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THE WRITINGS OF

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

IN NINE VOLUMES

WITH PORTRAITS AND MANY ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME II

Edwin Booth

THE WRITINGS
OF
THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

POEMS

VOLUME II

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
THE RIVERSIDE PRESS, CAMBRIDGE
1907

HMCo
7579

7579

1876

AND

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SPRING IN NEW ENGLAND

AN ODE

I

THE long years come and go,
And the Past,
The sorrowful, splendid Past,
With its glory and its woe,
Seems never to have been.
The bugle's taunting blast
Has died away by Southern ford and glen:
The mock-bird sings unfrightened in its dell;
The ensanguined stream flows free of stain;
Where once the hissing death-bolt fell,
And all along the artillery's level lines
Leapt flames of hell,
The planter smiles upon the sprouting grain,
And tends his vines.
Seems never to have been?
O sombre days and grand,
How ye crowd back again,
Seeing our heroes' graves are green

By the Potomac and the Cumberland,
And in the hush of many a lonely glen!

II

Now while the pale arbutus in our woods
Wakes to faint life beneath the dead year's leaves,
And the bleak North lets loose its wailing broods
Of winds upon us, and the gray sea grieves
Along our coast; while yet the Winter's hand
Heavily presses on New England's heart,
And Spring averts the sunshine of her eyes
Lest some vain cowslip should untimely start —
While we are housed in this rude season's gloom,
In this rude land,
Bereft of warmth and bloom,
We know, far off beneath the Southern skies,
Where the flush blossoms mock our drifts of snow
And the lithe vine unfolds its emerald sheen —
On many a sunny hillside there, we know
Our heroes' graves are green.

III

The long years come, but *they*
Come not again!
Through vapors dense and gray

Steals back the May,
But they come not again —
Swept by the battle's fiery breath
Down unknown ways of death.
How can our fancies help but go
Out from this realm of mist and rain,
Out from this realm of sleet and snow,
When the first Southern violets blow?

IV

While yet the year is young
Many a garland shall be hung
In our gardens of the dead;
On obelisk and urn
Shall the lilac's purple burn,
And the wild-rose leaves be shed.
And afar in the woodland ways,
Through the rustic church-yard gate
Matrons and maidens shall pass,
Striplings and white-haired men,
And, spreading aside the grass,
Linger at name and date,
Remembering old, old days!
And the lettering on each stone
Where the mould's green breath has blown
Tears shall wash clear again.

V

But far away to the South, in the sultry, stricken land —
On the banks of turbid streams gurgling among their reeds,
By many a drear morass, where the long-necked pelican feeds,
By many a dark bayou, and blinding dune of sand,
By many a cypress swamp where the cayman seeks its prey,
In many a moss-hung wood, the twilight's haunt by day,
And down where the land's parched lip drinks at the salt sea-waves,
And the ghostly sails glide by — there are piteous, nameless graves.

Their names no tongue may tell,
Buried there where they fell,
The bravest of our braves!
Never sweetheart, or friend,
Wan pale mother, or bride,
Over these mounds shall bend,
Tenderly putting aside
The unremembering grass!
Never the votive wreath
For the unknown brows beneath,
Never a tear, alas!

How can our fancies help but go
Out from this realm of mist and rain,
Out from this realm of sleet and snow,
When the first Southern violets blow?
How must our thought bend over them,
Blessing the flowers that cover them —
Piteous, nameless graves!

VI

Ah, but the life they gave
Is not shut in the grave:
The valorous spirits freed
Live in the vital deed!
Marble shall crumble to dust,
Plinth of bronze and of stone,
Carved escutcheon and crest —
Silently, one by one,
The sculptured lilies fall;
Softly the tooth of the rust
Gnaws through the brazen shield;
Broken, and covered with stains,
The crossed stone swords must yield;
Mined by the frost and the drouth,
Smitten by north and south,
Smitten by east and west,
Down comes column and all!
But the great deed remains.

VII

When we remember how they died —
In dark ravine and on the mountain-side,
In leaguered fort and fire-encircled town,
Upon the gunboat's splintered deck,
And where the iron ships went down —
How their dear lives were spent,
In the crushed and reddened wreck,
By lone lagoons and streams,
In the weary hospital-tent,
In the cockpit's crowded hive —
How they languished and died
In the black stockades — it seems
Ignoble to be alive!
Tears will well to our eyes,
And the bitter doubt will rise —
But hush! for the strife is done,
Forgiven are wound and scar;
The fight was fought and won
Long since, on sea and shore,
And every scattered star
Set in the blue once more:
We are one as before,
With the blot from our scutcheon gone!

VIII

So let our heroes rest
Upon your sunny breast:

Keep them, O South, our tender hearts and true,
Keep them, O South, and learn to hold them dear
From year to year!
Never forget,
Dying for us, they died for you.
This hallowed dust should knit us closer yet.

IX

Hark! 't is the bluebird's venturous strain
High on the old fringed elm at the gate,
Sweet-voiced, valiant on the swaying bough,
Alert, elate,
Dodging the fitful spits of snow —
New England's poet laureate
Telling us Spring has come again!
1875

WYNDHAM TOWERS

TO
EDWIN BOOTH
FROM
HIS FRIEND AND COMRADE
THESE MANY YEARS
1890.

BEFORE you reach the slender, high-arched bridge,
Like to a heron with one foot in stream,
The hamlet breaks upon you through green boughs —
A square stone church within a place of graves
Upon the slope; gray houses oddly grouped,
With plastered gables set with crossed oak-beams,
And roofs of yellow tile and purplish slate.
That is The Falcon, with the swinging sign
And rustic bench, an ancient hostelry;
Those leaden lattices were hung on hinge
In good Queen Bess's time, so old it is.
On ridge-piece, gable-end, or dove-cot vane,

A gilded weathercock at intervals
Glimmers — an angel on the wing, most like,
Of local workmanship ; for since the reign
Of pious Edward here have carvers thrived,
In saints'-heads skilful and winged cherubim
Meet for rich abbeys. From yon crumbling tower,
Whose brickwork base the cunning Romans laid —
And now of no use else except to train
The ivy of an idle legend on —
You see, such lens is this thin Devon air,
If it so chance no fog comes rolling in,
The Torridge where its branching crystal spreads
To join the Taw. Hard by from a chalk cliff
A torrent leaps : not lovelier Sappho was
Giving herself all silvery to the sea
From that Leucadian rock. Beneath your feet
Lie sand and surf in curving parallels.
Off shore, a buoy gleams like a dolphin's back
Dripping with brine, and guards a sunken reef
Whose sharp incisors have gnawed many a keel ;
There frets the sea and turns white at the lip,
And in ill-weather lets the ledge show fangs.
A very pleasant nook in Devon, this.

Upon the height of old was Wyndham Towers,
Clinging to rock there, like an eagle's nest,
With moat and drawbridge once, and good for siege ;
Four towers it had to front the diverse winds :

Built God knows when, all record being lost,
Locked in the memories of forgotten men.
In Cæsar's day, a pagan temple ; next
A monastery ; then a feudal hold ;
Later a manor, and at last a ruin.
Such knowledge have we of it, vaguely caught
Through whispers fallen from tradition's lip.
This shattered tower, with crenellated top
And loops for archers, alone marks the spot,
Looming forlornly — a gigantic harp
Whereon the invisible fingers of the wind
Its fitful and mysterious dirges play.

Here dwelt, in the last Tudor's virgin reign,
One Richard Wyndham, Knight and Gentleman
(The son of Rawdon, slain near Calais wall
When Bloody Mary lost her grip on France),
A lonely wight that no kith had nor kin
Save one, a brother — by ill-fortune's spite
A brother, since 't were better to have none —
Of late not often seen at Wyndham Towers,
Where he in truth but lenten welcome got
When to that gate his errant footstep strayed.
Yet he held dear those gray majestic walls,
Time-stained and crusted with the sea's salt breath ;
There first his eyes took color of the sea,
There did his heart stay when fate drove him thence,
And there at last — but that we tell anon.
Darrell they named him, for an ancestor

Whose bones were whitening in Holy Land,
The other Richard ; a crusader name,
Yet it was Darrell had the lion-heart.

No love and little liking served this pair,
In look and word unpaired as white and black —
Of once rich bough the last unlucky fruit.
The one, for straightness like a Norland pine
Set on some precipice's perilous edge,
Intrepid, handsome, little past blown youth,
Of all pure thought and brave deed amorous,
Moulded the court's high atmosphere to breathe,
Yet liking well the camp's more liberal air —
A poet, soldier, courtier, 't was the mode.
The other — as a glow-worm to a star —
Suspicious, morbid, passionate, self-involved,
The soul half eaten out with solitude,
Corroded, like a sword-blade left in sheath
Asleep and lost to action — in a word,
A misanthrope, a miser, a soured man,
One fortune loved not and looked at askance.
Yet he a pleasant outward semblance had.
Say what you will, and paint things as you may,
The devil is not black, with horn and hoof,
As gossips picture him : he is a person
Quite scrupulous of doublet and demeanor,
As was this Master Wyndham of the Towers,
Now latterly in most unhappy case,
Because of matters to be here set forth.

A thing of not much moment, as life goes,
A thing a man with some philosophy
Had idly brushed aside, as 't were a gnat
That winged itself between him and the light,
Had, through the crooked working of his mind,
Brought Wyndham to a very grievous pass.
Yet 't was a grapestone choked Anacreon
And hushed his song. There is no little thing
In nature: in a raindrop's compass lie
A planet's elements. This Wyndham's woe
Was one Griselda, daughter to a man
Of Bideford, a shipman once, but since
Turned soldier; now in white-haired, wrinkled age
Sitting beneath the olive, valiant still,
With sword on nail above the chimney-shelf
In case the Queen should need its edge again.
An officer he was, though lowly born.
The man aforetime, in the Netherlands
And through those ever-famous French campaigns
(Marry, in what wars bore he not a hand?)
In Rawdon Wyndham's troop of horse had served,
And when he fell that day by Calais wall
Had from the Frenchmen's pikes his body snatched,
And so much saved of him, which was not much,
The good knight being dead. For this deed's sake,
That did enlarge itself in sorrow's eye,
The widow deemed all guerdon all too small,
And held her dear lord's servant and his girl,
Born later, when that clash of steel was done,

As her own kin, till she herself was laid
In the earth and sainted elsewhere. The two sons
Let cool the friendship: one in foreign parts
Sought gold and honor; and one stayed at home,
The heir, and now of old friends negligent:
Thus fortune hardens the ignoble heart.

Griselda even as a little maid,
Demure, but with more crotchets in the brain,
I warrant you, than minutes to the hour,
Had this one much misliked; in her child-thought
Confused him somehow with those cruel shapes
Of iron men that up there at The Towers
Quickened her pulse. For he was gaunt, his face,
Mature beyond the logic of his years,
Had in it something sinister and grim,
Like to the visage pregnant fancy saw
Behind the bars of each disusèd casque
In that east chamber where the harness hung
And dinted shields of Wyndhams gone to grace —
At Poitiers this one, this at Agincourt,
That other on the sands of Palestine:
A breed of fierce man-slayers, sire and son.
Of these seemed Richard, with his steel cross-bow
Killing the doves in very wantonness,
The gentle doves that to the ramparts came
For scattered crumbs, undreamful of all ill.
Each well-sent bolt that pierced a snowy breast
Straight to her own white-budding bosom went.

Fled were those summers now, and she had passed
Out of the child-world of vain fantasy
Where many a rainbow castle lay in ruin;
But to her mind, like wine-stain to a flask,
The old distrust still clung, indelible,
Holding her in her maidhood's serious prime
Well pleased from his cold eyes to move apart,
And in her humble fortunes dwell secure.
Indeed, what was she? — a poor soldier's girl,
Merely a tenant's daughter. Times were changed,
And life's bright web had sadder colors in 't:
That most sweet gentle lady — rest her soul! —
Shrunk to an epitaph beside her lord's,
And six lines shorter, which was all a shame;
Gaunt Richard heir; that other at earth's end,
(The younger son that was her sweetheart once,)
Fighting the Spaniards, getting slain perchance;
And all dear old-time uses quite forgot.
Slowly, unnoted, like the creeping rust
That spreads insidious, had estrangement come,
Until at last, one knew not how it fell,
And little cared, if sober truth were said,
She and the father no more climbed the hill
To Twelfth Night festival or May-day dance,
Nor commerce had with any at The Towers.
Yet in a formless, misty sort of way
The girl had place in Wyndham's mind — the girl,
Why, yes, beshrew him! it was even she

Whom his soft mother had made favorite of,
And well-nigh spoiled, some dozen summers gone.

Perhaps because dull custom made her tame,
Or that she was not comely in the bud,
Her sweetness halting like a tardy May
That wraps itself in mist, and seems not fair,
For this or finer reason undivined,
His thought she touched not, and was glad withal
When she did note how others took his eye
And wore rue after. Thus was her white peace
Undarkened till, it so befell, these two
Meeting as they a hundred times had met
On hill-path or at crossing of the weir,
Her beauty broke on him like some rare flower
That was not yesterday. Ev'n so the Spring
Unclasps the girdle of its loveliness
Abruptly, in the North here: long the drifts
Linger in hollows, long on bough and briar
No slight leaf ventures, lest the frost's keen tooth
Nip it, and then all suddenly the earth
Is nought but scent and bloom. So unto him
Griselda's grace unclosed. Where lagged his wit
That guessed not of the bud within the stem,
Nor hint had of the flower within the bud?
If so much beauty had a tiger been,
'T had eaten him! In all the wave-washed length
Of rocky Devon where was found her like
For excellence of wedded red and white?

Here on that smooth and sunny field, her cheek,
The hostile hues of Lancaster and York
Did meet, and, blending, make a heavenly truce.
This were indeed a rose a king might wear
Upon his bosom. By St. Dunstan, now,
Himself would wear it. Then by seeming chance
He crossed her walks, and stayed her with discourse
Devised adroitly; spoke of common things
At first — of days when his good mother lived,
If 't were to live, to pass long dolorous hours
Before his father's effigy in church;
Of one who then used often come to hall,
Ever at Yule-tide, when the great log flamed
Upon the hearth, and laugh and jest went round,
And maidens strayed beneath the mistletoe,
Making believe not see it, so got kissed —
Of one that liked not the wild morrice-dance,
But in her sea-green kirtle stood at gaze,
A timid little creature that was scared
By dead men's armor. Nought there suffered change,
Those empty shells of valor grew not old,
Though something rusty. Would they fright her now
Looked she upon them? Held she in her mind
('T was Spring and loud the mavis piped outside)
The day the Turkish helmet slipped its peg,
And clashing on the floor, congealed her blood
And sent both hands to terror-smitten eyes,

She trembling, ready to yield up the ghost?
Right merry was it! Finally he touched
On matters nearer, things she had foreboded
And this one time must needs lend hearing to,
And end so sorry business ere woe came,
Like a true maid and honest, as she was.
So, tutoring the tremble on her lip
And holding back hot tears, she gave reply
With such discretion as straight tied his tongue,
Albeit he lacked not boldness in discourse:

"Indeed, indeed, sir, you speak but in jest!
Lightly, not meaning it, in courtier-way.
I have heard said that ladies at the Court —
I judge them not! — have most forgiving ears,
And list right willingly to idle words,
Listen and smile and never stain a cheek.
Yet not such words your father's son should use
With me, my father's daughter. You forget
What should most precious be to memory's heart,
Love that dared death; and so, farewell." Farewell
It was in truth; for after that one time,
Though he had fain with passion-breathèd vows
Besieged that marble citadel her breast,
He got no speech of her: she chose her walks;
Let only moon and star look on the face
That could well risk the candor of the sun;
Ran not to lattice at each sound of hoof;
By stream or hedge-row plucked no pansies more,

Fearing the sad fate of Persephone,
Herself up-gathered in Sicilian fields;
At chapel — for one needs to chapel go
A-Sunday — glanced not either right or left,
But with black eyelash wedded to her cheek
Knelt there impassive, like the marble girl
That at the foot-end of his father's tomb,
Inside the chancel where the Wyndhams lay,
Through the long years her icy vigil kept.

As leaves turn into flame at the frost's touch,
So Richard's heart on coldness fed its fire,
And burned with surfeit of indifference.
All flavor and complexion of content
Went out of life; what served once served no more.
His hound and falcon ceased to pleasure him;
He read — some musty folios there were
On shelf — but even in brave Froissart's page,
Where, God knows, there be wounds enough, no herb
Nor potion found he to purge sadness with.
The gray dust gathered on the leaf unturned,
And then the spider drew his thread across.
Certain bright coins that he was used to count
With thrill at fingers' ends uncounted lay,
Suddenly worthless, like the conjurer's gold
That midst the jeers and laughter of the crowd
Turns into ashes in the rustic's hand.
Soft idleness itself bore now a thorn

Two-pronged with meditation and desire.
The cold Griselda that would none of him!
The fair Griselda! Not alone by day,
With this most solid earth beneath his feet,
But in the weird and unsubstantial sphere
Of slumber did her beauty hold him thrall.
Herself of late he saw not; 't was a wraith
He worshipped, a vain shadow. Thus he pined
From dawn to dusk, and then from dusk to dawn,
Of that miraculous infection caught
From any-colored eyes, so they be sweet.
Strange that a man should let a maid's slim foot
Stamp on his happiness and quench it quite!

With what snail-pace the traitor time creeps by
When one is out with fortune and undone!
How tauntingly upon the dial's plate
The shadow's finger points the dismal hour!
Thus Wyndham, with hands clasped behind his back,
Watching the languid and reluctant sun
Fade from the metal disk beside the door.
The hours hung heavy up there on the hill,
Where life was little various at best
And merriment had long since taken flight.
Sometimes he sat and conned the flying clouds
Till on dusk's bosom nestled her one star,
And spoke no word, nor seemed alive at all,
But a mere shape and counterfeit of life;

Or, urged by some swift hunger for green boughs,
Would bid the hound to heel, and disappear
Into the forest, with himself communing
For lack of gossip. So do lonely men
Make themselves tedious to their tedious selves.
Thus he once passed in a white blaze of noon
Under his oaks, and muttered as he went:

"'My father's daughter' and 'your father's son'!
Faith, but it was a shrewd and nimble phrase,
And left me with no fitting word to say.
The wench hath wit and matter of her own,
And beauty, that doth seldom mate with wit.
Nature hath painted her a proper brown —
A russet-colored wench that knows her worth.
And mincing, too — should have her ruff propped
up
With supertasses, like a dame at Court,
And go in cloth-of-gold. I 'll get a suit
Of Genoa velvet, and so take her eye.
Has she a heart? The ladies of Whitehall
Are not so skittish, else does Darrell lie
Most villainously. Often hath he said
The art of blushing 's a lost art at Court.
If so, good riddance! This one here lets love
Play beggar to her prudery, and starve,
Feeding him ever on looks turned aside.
To be so young, so fair, and wise withal!
Lets love starve? Nay, I think starves merely me,

And gives to others gracious nourishment.
For when was ever woman logical
Both day and night-time? Not since Adam fell!
I doubt a lover somewhere. What shrewd bee
Hath buzzed betimes about this clover-top?
Belike some scrivener's clerk at Bideford,
With long goose-quill and inkhorn at his thigh —
Methinks I see the parchment face of him;
Or one of those swashbuckler Devon lads
That haunt the inn there, with red Spanish gold,
Rank scurvy knaves, ripe fruit for gallows-tree;
Or else the sexton's son" — here Wyndham laughed,
Though not a man of mirth; indeed, a man
Of niggard humor; but that sexton's son —
Lean as the shadow cast by a church spire,
Eyes deep in the sockets, noseless, high cheek-boned,
Like nothing in the circle of this earth
But a death's head that from a mural slab
Within the chancel leers through sermon-time,
Making a mock of poor mortality.
The fancy touched him, and he laughed a laugh
That from his noonday slumber roused an owl
Snug in his oaken hermitage hard by.
A very rare conceit — the sexton's son!

Not he, forsooth; he smacked of churchyard mould

And musty odors of moth-eaten palls —
A living death, a walking epitaph!
No lover that for tingling flesh and blood
To rest soft cheek on and change kisses with.
Yet lover somewhere; from his sly cocoon
Time would unshell him. In the interim
What was to do but wait, and mark who strolled
Of evenings up the hill-path and made halt
This side the coppice at a certain gate?
For by that chance which ever serves ill ends,
Within the slanted shadow of The Towers
The maid Griselda dwelt. Her gray scarred sire
Had for cloth doublet changed the steel cuirass,
The sword for gardener's fork, and so henceforth
In the mild autumn and sundown of life,
Moving erect among his curves and squares
Of lily, rose, and purple flower-de-luce,
Set none but harmless squadrons in the field —
Save now and then at tavern, where he posed,
Tankard in hand and prattling of old days,
A white-mustached epitome of wars.

How runs the proverb touching him who waits?
Who waits shall have the world. Time's heir is he,
Be he but patient. Thus the thing befell
Wherefrom grew all this history of woe:
Haunting the grounds one night, as his use was
Who loved the dark as bats and owlets do,
Wyndham got sound of voices in the air

That did such strange and goblin changes ring
As left him doubtful whence the murmurs came,
Now here, now there, as they were wingèd things —
Such trick plays Echo upon hapless wights
Chance-caught in lonely places where she dwells.
Anon a laugh rang out, melodious,
Like the merle's note when its ecstatic heart
Is packed with summer-time; then all was still —
So still the soul of silence seemed to grieve
The loss of that sweet laughter. In his tracks
The man stopped short, and listened. As he leaned
And craned his neck, and peered into the gloom,
And would the fabulous hundred eyes were his
That Argus in the Grecian legend had,
He saw two figures moving through a drift
Of moonlight that lay stretched across the lawn:
A man's tall shape, a slim shape close at side,
Her palm in tender fashion pressed to his,
The woven snood about her shoulders fallen,
And from the sombre midnight of her hair
An ardent face out-looking like a star —
As in a vision he saw this, for straight
They vanished. Where those silvery shadows were
Was nothing. Had he dreamed it? Had he gone
Mad with much thinking on her, and so made
Ghosts of his own sick fancies? Like a man
Carved out of alabaster and set up
Within a woodland, he stood rooted there,
Glimmering wanly under pendent boughs.

Spell-bound he stood, in very woful plight,
Bewildered; and then presently with shock
Of rapid pulses hammering at his heart,
As mad besiegers hammer at a gate,
To life came back, and turned and would have flown
From that accursèd spot and all that was,
When once more the girl's laughter witched the night,
And melted, and the silence grieved anew.
Like lead his feet were, and he needs must halt.
Close upon this, but farther off, a voice
From somewhere — Echo at her trick again! —
Took up the rhyme of *Sweetheart, sigh no more.*

It was with doubt and trembling
I whispered in her ear.
Go, take her answer, bird-on-bough,
That all the world may hear —
Sweetheart, sigh no more!

Sing it, sing it, tawny throat,
Upon the wayside tree,
How fair she is, how true she is,
How dear she is to me —
Sweetheart, sigh no more!

Sing it, sing it, tawny throat,
And through the summer long

The winds among the clover-tops,
And brooks, for all their silvery stops,
Shall envy you the song —
Sweetheart, sigh no more.

The fierce Malayans have an arrow steeped
In some strange drug whose subtile properties
Are such that if the point but prick the skin
Death stays there. Like to that fell cruel shaft
This slender rhyme was. Through the purple dark
Straight home it sped, and into Wyndham's veins
Its drop of sudden poison did distil.
Now no sound was, save when a dry twig snapped
And rustled softly down from bough to bough,
Or on its pebbly shoals the narrow brook
Made intermittent murmur. "So, 't is he!"
Thus Wyndham breathing thickly, with his eyes
Dilating in the darkness, "Darrell — he!
I set my springe for other game than this;
Of hare or rabbit dreamed I, not of wolf.
His frequent visitations have of late
Perplexed me; now the riddle reads itself.
A proper man, a very proper man!
A fellow that burns Trinidado leaf
And sends smoke through his nostril like a flue!
A fop, a hanger-on of willing skirts —
A murrain on him! Would Elizabeth
In some mad freak had clapped him in the Tower —
Ay, through the Traitor's Gate. Would he were
dead.

Within the year what worthy men have died,
Persons of substance, civic ornaments,
And here 's this gilt court-butterfly on wing!
O thou most potent lightning in the cloud,
Prick me this fellow from the face of earth!
I would the Moors had got him in Algiers
What time he harried them on land and sea,
And done their will with scimitar or cord
Or flame of fagot, and so made an end;
Or that some shot from petronel or bow
Had winged him in the folly of his flight.
Well had it been if the Inquisitors,
With rack and screw, had laid black claw on him!"
In days whose chronicle is writ in blood
The richest ever flowed in English veins
Some foul mischance in this sort might have been;
For at dark Fortune's feet had Darrell flung
In his youth's flower a daring gauntlet down.

A beardless stripling, at that solemn hour
When, breaking its frail filaments of clay,
The mother's spirit soared invisible,
The younger son, unhoused as well he knew,
Had taken horse by night to London town,
With right sore heart and nought else in his scrip
But boyish hope to footing find at Court —
A page's place, belike, with some great lord,
Or some small lord, that other proving shy
Of merit that had not yet chipped its shell.

Day after day, in weather foul or fair,
With lackeys, hucksters, and the commoner sort,
At Whitehall and Westminster he stood guard,
Reading men's faces with inquiring eye.
There the lords swarmed, some waspish and some bland,
But none would pause at plucking of the sleeve
To hearken to him, and the lad had died
On London stones for lack of crust to gnaw
But that he caught the age's malady,
The something magical that was in air,
And made men poets, heroes, demigods —
Made Shakespeare, Raleigh, Grenville, Oxenham,
And set them stars in the fore-front of Time.
In fine, young Darrell drew of that same air
A valiant breath, and shipped with Francis Drake,
Of Tavistock, to sail the Spanish seas
And teach the heathen manners, with God's aid;
And so, among lean Papists and black Moors,
He, with the din of battle in his ears,
Struck fortune. Who would tamely bide at home
At beck and call of some proud swollen lord
Not worth his biscuit, or at Beauty's feet
Sit making sonnets, when was work to do
Out yonder, sinking Philip's caravels
At sea, and then by way of episode
Setting quick torch [1] to pirate-nests ashore?

[1] Sir Francis Drake called this "singeing the King of Spayne's beard."

Brave sport to singe the beard o' the King of Spain!
Brave sport, but in the end he dreamed of home —
Of where the trout-brook lisped among the reeds,
Of great chalk cliffs and leagues of yellow gorse,
Of peaceful lanes, of London's roaring streets,
The crowds, the shops, the pageants in Cheapside,
And heard the trumpets blaring for the Queen
When 't was the wind that whistled in the shrouds
Off Cadiz. Ah, and softer dreams he had
Of an unnamed and sweetest mystery,
And from the marble of his soul's desire
Hewed out the white ideal of his love —
A new Pygmalion. All things drew him home,
This mainly. Foot on English earth once more,
Dear earth of England! his propitious fame
A thorn in none but crooked Envy's side,
He went cross-gartered, with a silken rose
Fixed to his lovelock, diamond brooch at hat
Looping one side up very gallantly,
And changed his doublet's color twice a day.
Ill fare had given his softer senses edge;
Good fortune, later, bade him come to dine,
Mild Spenser's scholar, Philip Sidney's friend.
So took he now his ease; in Devonshire,
When Town was dull, or he had need at heart
For sight of Wyndham Towers against the sky;
But chiefly did he bask him by the Thames,

For there 't was that Young England froze and
thawed
By turns in GLORIANA's frown and smile.

As some wild animal that gets a wound,
And prescience hath of death, will drag itself
Back to its cavern sullenly to die,
And would not have heaven's airs for witnesses,
So Wyndham, shrinking from the very stars
And tell-tale places where the moonlight fell,
Crept through the huddled shadows back to hall,
And in a lonely room where no light was,
Save what the moon made at the casement there,
Sat pondering his hurt, and in the dark
Gave audience to a host of grievances.
For never comes reflection, gay or grave,
But it brings with it comrades of its hue.
So did he fall to thinking how his day
Declined, and how his narrow life had run
Obscurely through an age of great events
Such as men never saw, nor will again
Until the globe be riven by God's fire.
Others had ventured for the Golden Fleece,
Knaves of no parts at all, and got renown
(By force of circumstance and not desert),
While he up there on that rock-bastioned coast
Had rotted like some old hulk's skeleton,
Whose naked and bleached ribs the lazy tide
Laps day by day, and no man thinks of more.

Then was jade Fortune in her lavish mood.
Why had he not for distant Colchis sailed
And been the Jason of these Argonauts?
True, some had come to block on Tower Hill,
Or quittance made in a less noble sort;
Still they had lived, from life's high-mantling cup
Had blown the bead. In such case, if one's head
Be of its momentary laurel stripped
And made a show of, stuck on Temple Bar
Or at the Southwark end of London Bridge,
What mattered it? At worst man dies but once —
So far as known. One may not master death,
But life should be one's lackey. He had been
Time's dupe and bondman; ever since his birth
Had walked this planet with his eye oblique,
Grasped what was worthless, what were most dear
missed;
Missed love and fame, and all the goodly things
Fame gets a man in England — the Queen's smile,
Which means, when she 's in humor, abbey-lands,
Appointments, stars and ribbons for the breast,
And that sleek adulation that takes shape
In the down-drooping of obsequious lids
When one ascends a stair or walks the pave.
Good Lord! but it was excellent to see
How Expectation in the ante-room
Crooks back to Greatness passing to the Queen —
"Kind sir!" "Sweet sir!" "I prithee speed my
suit!"

'T was somewhat to be flattered, though by fools,
For even a fool's coin hath a kind of ring.
Yet after all — thus did the grapes turn sour
To master Fox, in fable — who would care
To moil and toil to gain a little fame,
And have each rascal that prowls under heaven
Stab one for getting it? Had he wished power,
The thing was in the market-place for sale
At stated rates — so much for a man's soul!
His was a haughty spirit that bent not,
And one to rise had need to cringe and creep.
So had his brother into favor crawled,
Like the cold slug into the lily's heart,
And battened in the sun. At thought of him,
Forgotten for a moment, Wyndham winced,
And felt his wound. "Why bides he not in Town
With his blond lovelock and wench-luring ways —
There runs his fox! What foul fiend sends him here
To Wyndham Towers? Is there not space enough
In this our England he needs crowd me so?
Has London sack upon his palate staled,
That he must come to sip my Devon cream?
Are all maids shut in nunneries save this one?
What magic philtre hath he given her
To thaw the ice that melted not for me?
Rich is he now that at his setting forth
Had not two silver pieces to his purse.
It is his brave apparel dazzles her.

Thus puts he bound and barrier to my love.
Another man were he abused as I . . .
I will no more of him! If I but dared —
Nay, I dare not. I have fawn's blood, I think;
I would, and dare not!" Thrice the hooded clock
Solemnly, like some old Carthusian monk
With wrinkled face half seen beneath his cowl,
Intoned the quarter. Memory went not back
When this was not a most familiar sound,
Yet as each stroke on the dead silence fell
Wyndham turned, startled. Now the sanguine moon,
To clouded opal changing momently,
Rose sheer above the pine-trees' ragged edge,
And through the wide-flung casement reaching hand
With cold and spectral finger touched the plates
Of his dead father's armor till it gleamed
One mass of silver. There it stood complete,
That august panoply which once struck dread
To foemen on the sunny plains of France,
Menacing, terrible, this instant stood,
With vizard down and jousting-lance at charge
As if that crumbled knight were quick within.

A footfall on the shingle walk below
Grated, a footfall light as Mercury's
Disdaining earth, and Wyndham in the dark,
Half crouched upon the settle with his nails

Indenting the soft wood-work, held his breath.
Then suddenly a blind rage like a flame
Swept over him and hurled him to his feet —
Such rage as must have seized the soul of Cain
Meeting his brother in the stubble-field.
Anon came one that hummed a blithe sea-song,
As he were fresh from tavern and brave cheer,
And held the stars that blinked there in the blue
Boon comrades. Singing in high-hearted way,
His true-love's kiss a memory on his lip,
Straight on he came to unrenownèd end
Whose dream had been in good plate mail to die
On some well-foughten field, at set of sun,
With glorious peal of trumpets on his ear
Proclaiming victory. So had he dreamed.
And there, within an arch at the stair-top
And screened behind a painted hanging-cloth
Of coiled gold serpents ready to make spring,
Ignoble Death stood, his convulsive hand
Grasping a rapier part-way down the blade
To deal the blow with deadly-jewelled hilt —
Black Death, turned white with horror of himself.
Straight on came he that sang the blithe sea-song;
And now his step was on the stair, and now
He neared the blazoned hanging-cloth, and now . . .

The lights were out, and all life lay in trance
On floor or pallet, muffled to the chin,
Each in his mask of sullen-featured death —

Fond souls that recked not what was in the air,
Else had the dead man's scabbard as it clashed
Against the balustrade, then on the tiles,
Brought awkward witness. One base hind there was
Had stolen a venison-pasty on the shelf,
And now did penance; him the fall half roused
From dreadful nightmare; once he turned and gasped,
Then straightway snored again. No other sound
Within the dream-enchanted house was heard,
Save that the mastiff, lying at the gate
With visionary bone, snarled in his sleep.
Secret as bridal-kiss may murder be.

Done was the deed that could not be undone
Throughout eternity. O silent tongue
That would blab all with silence! What to do?
How hide this speechless witness from men's gaze?
Living, that body vexed us; being dead
'T is like to give us trouble and to spare.
O for a cavern in deep-bowelled earth!
Quick, ere the dusky petals of the night
Unclosing bare the fiery heart of dawn
And thus undo us with its garish light,
Let us this mute and pale accusing clay
In some undreamed-of sepulchre bestow.
But where? Hold back thy fleet-wing'd coursers, Time,

Whilst we bethink us! Ah — such place there is!
Close, too, at hand — a place wherein a man
Might lie till doomsday safer from the touch
Of prying clown than is the spicèd dust
Of an Egyptian in his pyramid.

At a dark alcove's end of that long hall,
The ancient armor-room in the east wing,
A certain door (whereof no mortal knew
Save Wyndham, now that other lay a-cold)
Was to the panels of the wall so set,
And with such devilish shrewdness overlaid
By carvings of wild-flower and curled grape-leaf,
That one not in the favor of the trick,
Albeit he knew such mechanism was,
Ere he put finger on the secret spring
Had need of Job for ancestor, in faith!
You pressed a rose, a least suspected rose,
And two doors turned on hinge, the inner door
Closing a space of say some six feet square,
Unlighted, sheathed with iron. Doubtless here
The mediæval Wyndhams hid their plate
When things looked wicked from the outer wall,
Or, on occasion, a grim ruthless lord
Immured some inconvenient two-faced friend —
To banquet bidden, and kept over night.
Such pranks were played in Merrie England then.
Sealed in the narrow compass of that cell,
Shut from God's light and his most precious air,

A man might have of life a half-hour's lease
If he were hale and well-breathed at the start.

Hither did Richard bear his brother's corse
And fling it down. Upon the stone-paved floor
In a thin strip of moonlight flung it down,
And then drew breath. Perhaps he paused to glance
At the white face there, with the strange half-smile
Outliving death, the brightness of the hair
Lying in loops and tangles round the brow —
A seraph's face of silver set in gold,
Such as the deft Italians know to carve;
Perhaps his tiger's blood cooled then, perhaps
Swift pity at his very heart-strings tugged,
And he in that black moment of remorse,
Seeing how there his nobler self lay slain,
Had bartered all this jewel-studded earth
To win life's color back to that wan cheek.
Ah, let us hope it, and some mercy feel,
Since each at compt shall need of mercy have.
Now how it happened, whether 't was the wind,
Or whether 't was some incorporeal hand
That reached down through the dark and did the thing,
Man knoweth not, but suddenly both doors,
Ere one could utter cry or stretch an arm,
Closed with dull clang, and there in his own trap
Incontinent was red-stained Richard caught,

And as by flash of lightning saw his doom.
Call, if thou wilt, but every ear is stuffed
With slumber! Shriek, and run quick frenzied hands
Along the iron sheathing of thy grave —
For 't is thy grave — no egress shalt thou find,
No lock to break, no subtile-sliding bolt,
No careless rivet, no half loosened plate
For dagger's point to fret at and pry off
And let a stifling mortal get to air!

Angels of Light! what were a thousand years
Of rankling envy and contemnèd love
And all the bitter draughts a man may drink
To that half hour of Richard's with his Dead?

II

THROUGH silence, gloom, and star-strown paths of Night
The breathless hours like phantoms stole away.
Black lay the earth, in primal blackness wrapped
Ere the great miracle once more was wrought.
A chill wind freshened in the pallid East
And brought sea-smell of newly blossomed foam,
And stirred the leaves and branch-hung nests of birds.
Fainter the glow-worm's lantern glimmered now
In the marsh land and on the forest's hem,
And the slow dawn with purple laced the sky
Where sky and sea lay sharply edge to edge.
The purple melted, changed to violet,
And that to every delicate sea-shell tinge,
Blush-pink, deep cinnabar; then no change was,
Save that the air had in it sense of wings,
Till suddenly the heavens were all aflame,
And it was morning. O great miracle!
O radiance and splendor of the Throne,
Daily vouchsafed to us! Yet saith the fool,
"There is no God!" And now a level gleam,

Thrust like a spear-head through the tangled
boughs,
Smote Wyndham turrets, and the spell was broke.

And one by one, on pallet stretched or floor,
The sleepers wakened; each took up afresh
His load of life; but two there were woke not,
Nor knew 't was daybreak. From the rusty nail
The gateman snatched his bunch of ancient keys,
And, yawning, vowed the sun an hour too soon;
The scullion, with face shining like his pans,
Hose down at heel and jerkin half unlaced,
On hearthstone knelt to coax the smouldering log;
The keeper fetched the yelping hounds their meat;
The hostler whistled in the stalls; anon,
With rustling skirt and slumber-freshened cheek,
The kerchief'd housemaid tripped from room to
room
(Sweet Gillian, she that broke the groom his heart),
While, wroth within, behind a high-backed chair
The withered butler for his master waited,
Cursing the cook. That day the brewis spoiled.

That day came neither kinsman to break bread.
When it was seen that both had lain abroad,
The wolf-skins of their couches made that plain
As pike-staff, or the mole on Gillian's cheek,
The servants stared. Some journey called them
hence;

At dead of night some messenger had come
Of secret import, may be from the Queen,
And they paused not for change of raiment even.
And yet, in faith, that were but little like;
Sir Richard had scant dealings with the Court.
Still — if Northumberland were in arms again.
'T was passing strange. No beast had gone from rack.
How had they gone, then? Who looked on them last?
Up rose the withered butler, he it was:
They supped together, of no journey spoke,
Spoke little, 't was their custom; after meal
The master's brother sallied forth alone,
The master stayed within. "That did he not,"
Quoth one, "I saw Sir Richard in the close
I' the moonrise." "'T was eleven on the stroke,"
Said Gillian softly, "he, or 't was his ghost —
Methought his face was whiter than my smock —
Passed through the courtyard, and so into house.
Yet slept he not there!" And that other one,
The guest unwelcome, kinsman little loved
(How these shrewd varlets turn us inside out
At kitchen-conclaves, over our own wine!)
Him had no eye seen since he issued forth
As curfew sounded. "Call me lying knave" —
He of the venison-pasty had the word —
"And let me nevermore dip beak in ale
Or sit at trencher with good smoking meat,

If I heard not, in middle of the night,
The cock crow thrice, and took it for a sign."
"So, marry, 't was — that thou wert drunk again."
But no one laughed save he that made the jest,
Which often happens. The long hours wore on,
And gloaming fell. Then came another day,
And then another, until seven dawns
In Time's slow crucible ran ruddy gold
And overflowed the gray horizon's edge;
And yet no hosts at table — an ill thing!
And now 't was on the eve of Michaelmas.

What could it bode? From out their lethargy
At last awaking, searchers in hot haste,
Some in the saddle, some afoot with hounds,
Scoured moor and woodland, dragged the neighboring weirs
And salmon-streams, and watched the wily hawk
Slip from his azure ambush overhead,
With ever a keen eye for carrion:
But no man found, nor aught that once was man.
By land they went not; went they water-ways?
Might be, from Bideford or Ilfracombe.
Mayhap they were in London, who could tell?
God help us! do men melt into the air?
Yet one there was whose dumb unlanguaged love
Had all revealed, had they but given heed.
Across the threshold of the armor-room
The savage mastiff stretched himself, and starved.

Now where lags he, upon what alehouse bench
'Twixt here and London, who shall lift this weight?
Were he not slain upon the Queen's highway
Ere he reached Town, or tumbled into ford
With too much sack-and-sugar under belt,
Then was his face set homeward this same hour.
Why lingers he? Ill news, 't is said, flies fast,
And good news creeps; then his must needs be good
That lets the tortoise pass him on the road.
Ride, Dawkins, ride! by flashing tarn and fen
And haunted hollow! Look not where in chains
On Hounslow Heath the malefactor hangs,
A lasting terror! Give thy roan jade spur,
And spare her not! All Devon waits for thee,
Thou, for the moment, most important man!
A sevennight later, when the rider sent
To Town drew rein before The Falcon inn
Under the creaking of the windy sign,
And slipped from saddle with most valorous call
For beer to wash his throat out, then confessed
He brought no scrap of any honest news,
The last hope died, and so the quest was done.
"They fared afoot," quoth one, "but where God knows."

The blackthorn bloomed anew, and the long grass
Was starred with flowers that once Griselda prized,
But plucked not. She, poor wench, from moon to moon

Waxed pale and paler : of no known disease,
The village-leech averred, with lips pursed out
And cane at chin ; some inward fire, he thought,
Consumed. A dark inexplicable blight
Had touched her, thinned her, till of that sweet earth
Scarce more was left than would have served to grow
A lily. Later, at a fresh-turned grave,
From out the maiden strewments, as it were,
A whisper rose, of most pathetic breath,
Of how one maid had been by two men loved —
No names, God's mercy ! — and that neither man
Would wed her : why ? — conjecture faltered there,
For whiter was she than new-drifted snow,
Or bleached lamb's wool, or any purest thing,
Such stuff in sooth as Heaven shapes angels of ;
And how from their warm, comfortable beds
These two men wandered out into the night,
Sore stricken and distempered in their mind,
And being by Satan blinded and urged on
Flung themselves headlong from a certain crag
That up Clovelly way o'erhangs the sea —
O'erhangs the sea to tempt unhappy folk.
From door to door the piteous legend passed,
And like a thrifty beggar took from each.
And when the long autumnal season came
To that bleak, bitter coast, and when at night
The deep was shaken, and the pent cloud broke
Crashing among the lurid hills of heaven,

And in brief sudden swoonings of the gale
Contentious voices rose from the sand-dunes,
Then to low sobs and murmurs died away,
The fishwives, with their lean and sallow cheeks
Lit by the flickering driftwood's ruddy glow,
Drew closer to the crane, and under breath
To awestruck maidens told the fearful tale.

The red leaf withered and the green leaf grew.
'T was said that once the Queen reached out her hand —
This was at Richmond in her palac. there —
And let it rest on Burleigh's velvet sleeve,
And spoke — right stately was she in her rouge:
" Prithee, good Master Cecil, tell us now
Was 't ever known what ill befell those men,
Those Wyndhams? Were they never, never found?
Look you, 't will be three years come Michaelmas:
'T were well to have at least the bones of them.
'Fore God, sir! this is something should be seen!
When the Armada, which God smote and sunk,
Threatened our Realm, our buckler and our shield
Were such stout hearts as that young Wyndham was.
The elder brother — well, Heaven made us all.
Our subjects are our subjects, mark you that.
Not found, forsooth! Why, then, they should be found!"
Fain had my good Lord Burleigh solved the thing,

And smoothed that ominous wrinkle on the brow
Of her Most Sweet Imperious Majesty.
Full many a problem his statecraft had solved —
How strangle treason, how soothe turbulent peers,
How foil the Pope and Spain, how pay the Fleet —
Mere temporal matters; but this business smelt
Strongly of brimstone. Bring back vanished folk!
That could not Master Cecil if he would.

The red leaf withered and the green leaf grew.
Dark were the days that came to Wyndham Towers
With that grim secret rusting in its heart.
On the sea's side along the fissured wall
The lichen spread in patches of dull gold
Up to the battlements, at times assailed
By sheeted ghosts of mist blown from the sea,
Now by the whistling arrows of the sleet
Pelted, and thrice of lightning scorched and seamed,
But stoutly held from dreary year to year
By legions of most venerable rooks,
Shrill black-robed prelates of the fighting sort.
In the wide moat, run dry with summer drought,
Great scarlet poppies lay in drifts and heaps,
Like bodies fallen there in some vain assault.
Within, decay and dolor had their court —
Dolor, decay, and silence, lords of all.
From room to room the wind went shuddering
On some vague endless quest; now pausing here
To lift an arras, and then hurrying on,

To some fresh clue, belike! The sharp-nosed
mouse
Through joist and floor discreetly gnawed her way,
And for her glossy young a lodging made
In a cracked corselet that once held a heart.
The meditative spider undisturbed
Wove his gray tapestry from sill to sill.
Over the transom the stone eagle drooped,
With one wing gone, in most dejected state
Moulting his feathers. A blue poisonous vine,
Whose lucent berry, hard as Indian jade,
No squirrel tried his tooth on, June by June
On the south hill-slope festered in the sun.
Man's foot came not there. It was haunted ground.

The red leaf withered and the green leaf grew.
An oak stood where an acorn tumbled once,
Ages ago, and all the world was strange.
Now, in that year King Charles the Second left
Forever the soft arms of Mistress Gwynn
And wrapped him in that marble where he lies,
The moulder'd pile with its entombèd Crime
Passed to the keep of a brave new-fledged lord,
Who, liking much the sane and wholesome air
That bent the boughs and fanned the turret's top,
Cried, "Here dwell I!" So fell it on a day
The stroke of mallets and the screech of saws
In those bleak chambers made such din as stopped
The careful spider half-way up his thread,

And panic sent to myriad furtive things
That dwelt in wainscots and loved not the sun.
Vainly in broken phalanx clamorous
Did the scared rooks protest, and all in vain
The moths on indolent white damask wings
At door and casement rallied. Wyndham Towers
Should have a bride, and ghosts had word to quit.

And now, behold what strange thing came to pass.
A certain workman, in the eastern wing
Plying his craft alone as the day waned —
One Gregory Nokes, a very honest soul,
By trade wood-carver — stumbled on a door
Leading to nowhere at an alcove's end,
A double door that of itself swung back
In such strange way as no man ever saw;
And there, within a closet, on the flags
Were two grim shapes which, vaguely seen at first
In the half light, grew presently distinct —
Two gnomes or vampires seemed they, or dire imps
Straight from the Pit, in guise fantastical
Of hose and doublet: one stretched out full length
Supine, and one in terror-stricken sort
Half toppled forward on the bended knee,
Grasping with vise-like grip the other's wrist,
As who should say, *Arouse thee, sleep no more!*
But said it not. If they were quick or dead,
No sign they gave beyond this sad dumb show.

Blurred one face was, yet luminous, like the moon
Caught in the fleecy network of a cloud,
Or seen glassed on the surface of a tarn
When the wind crinkles it and makes all dim;
The other, drawn and wrenched by mortal throes,
And in the aspect such beseeching look
As might befall some poor wretch called to compt
On the sudden, even as he kneels at prayer,
With *Mercy!* turned to frost upon his lip.

Thus much saw Nokes within the closet there
Ere he drew breath; then backing step by step,
The chisel clutched in still uplifted hand,
His eyes still fixed upon the ghosts, he reached
An open window giving on the court
Where the stone-cutters were; to them he called
Softly, in whispers under his curved palm,
Lest peradventure a loud word should rouse
The phantoms; but ere foot could climb the stair,
Or the heart's pulses count the sum of ten,
Through both dread shapes, as at God's finger-
touch,
A shiver ran, the wavering outlines broke,
And suddenly a chill and mist-like breath
Touched Nokes's cheek as he at casement leaned,
And nought was left of that most piteous pair
Save two long rapiers of some foreign make
Lying there crossed, a mass of flaky rust.

O luckless carver of dead images,
Saint's-head or gargoyle, thou hast seen a sight
Shall last thee to the confines of the grave!
Ill were thy stars or ever thou wert born
That thou shouldst look upon a thing forbid!
Now in thine eye shall it forever live,
And the waste solitudes of night inhabit
With direful shadows of the nether world,
Yet leave thee lonely in the throng of men —
Not of them, thou, but creature set apart
Under a ban, and doomed henceforth to know
The wise man's scorn, the dull man's sorry jest.
For who could credence give to that mad tale
Of churchyard folk appearing in broad day,
And drifting out at casement like a mist?
Marry, not they who crowded up the stair
In haste, and peered into that empty cell,
And had half mind to buffet Master Nokes,
Standing with finger laid across his palm
In argumentative, appealing way,
Distraught, of countenance most woe-begone.
"See! — the two swords. As I 'm a Christian soul!"
"Odds, man!" cried one, "thou 'st been a-dreamin', man.
Cleave to thy beer, an' let strong drink alone!"

So runs the legend. So from their long sleep
Those ghosts arose and fled across the night.

But never bride came to that dark abode,
For wild flames swept it ere a month was gone,
And nothing spared but that forlorn old tower
Whereon the invisible fingers of the wind
Its fitful and mysterious dirges play.

THE SISTERS' TRAGEDY

WITH OTHER POEMS

THE SISTERS' TRAGEDY

A. D. 1670

AGLÄE, a widow.
MURIEL, her unmarried sister.

IT happened once, in that brave land that lies
Wrapped half the year in mist and sombre skies,
Two sisters loved one man. He being dead,
Grief loosed the lips of her he had not wed,
And all the passion that through heavy years
Had masked in smiles unmasked itself in tears.
No purer love may mortals know than this,
The hidden love that guards another's bliss.

High in a turret's westward-facing room,
Whose painted window held the sunset's bloom,
The two together grieving, each to each
Unveiled her soul with sobs and broken speech.
Both still were young, in life's rich summer yet;
And one was dark, with tints of violet

In hair and eyes, and one was blond as she
Who rose — a second daybreak — from the sea,
Gold-tressed and azure-eyed. In that lone place,
Like dusk and dawn, they sat there face to face.

She spoke the first whose strangely silvering hair
No wreath had worn, nor widow's weed might wear,
And told her blameless love, and knew no shame —
Her holy love that, like a vestal flame
Beside the sacred body of some queen
Within a guarded crypt, had burned unseen
From weary year to year. And she who heard
Smiled proudly through her tears and said no word,
But, drawing closer, on the troubled brow
Laid one long kiss, and that was words enow!

MURIEL

Be still, my heart! Grown patient with thine ache
Thou shouldst be dumb, yet needs must speak, or break.
The world is empty now that he is gone.

AGLÄE

Ay, sweetheart!

MURIEL

None was like him, no, not one.
From other men he stood apart, alone

In honor spotless as unfallen snow.
Nothing all evil was it his to know ;
His charity still found some germ, some spark
Of light in natures that seemed wholly dark.
He read men's souls ; the lowly and the high
Moved on the self-same level in his eye.
Gracious to all, to none subservient,
Without offence he spake the word he meant —
His word no trick of tact or courtly art,
But the white flowering of the noble heart.
Careless he was of much the world counts gain,
Careless of self, too simple to be vain,
Yet strung so finely that for conscience' sake
He would have gone like Cranmer to the stake.
I saw — how could I help but love ? And you —

AGLÄE

At this perfection did I worship too . . .
'T was this that stabbed me. Heed not what I say !
I meant it not, my wits are gone astray,
With all that is and has been. No, I lie —
Had he been less perfection, happier I !

MURIEL

Strange words and wild ! 'T is the distracted mind
Breathes them, not you, and I no meaning find.

AGLÄE

Yet 't were as plain as writing on a scroll
Had you but eyes to read within my soul. —

How a grief hidden feeds on its own mood,
Poisons the healthful currents of the blood
With bitterness, and turns the heart to stone!
I think, in truth, 't were better to make moan,
And so be done with it. This many a year,
Sweetheart, have I laughed lightly and made cheer,
Pierced through with sorrow!

Then the widowed one
With sorrowfullest eyes beneath the sun,
Faltered, irresolute, and bending low
Her head, half whispered,

"Dear, how could you know?
What masks are faces! — yours, unread by me
These seven long summers; mine, so placidly
Shielding my woe! No tremble of the lip,
No cheek's quick pallor let our secret slip!
Mere players we, and she that played the queen,
Now in her homespun, looks how poor and mean!
How shall I say it, how find words to tell
What thing it was for me made earth a hell
That else had been my heaven! 'T would blanch your cheek
Were I to speak it. Nay, but I will speak,
Since like two souls at compt we seem to stand,
Where nothing may be hidden. Hold my hand,
But look not at me! Noble 't was, and meet,
To hide your heart, nor fling it at his feet

To lie despised there. Thus saved you our pride
And that white honor for which earls have died.
You were not all unhappy, loving so!
I with a difference wore my weight of woe.
My lord was he. It was my cruel lot,
My hell, to love him — for he loved me not!"

Then came a silence. Suddenly like death
The truth flashed on them, and each held her breath —
A flash of light whereby they both were slain,
She that was loved and she that loved in vain!

ELMWOOD

IN MEMORY OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

HERE, in the twilight, at the well-known gate
I linger, with no heart to enter more.
Among the elm-tops the autumnal air
Murmurs, and spectral in the fading light
A solitary heron wings its way
Southward — save this no sound or touch of life.
Dark is that window where the scholar's lamp
Was used to catch a pallor from the dawn.

Yet I must needs a little linger here.
Each shrub and tree is eloquent of him,

For tongueless things and silence have their speech.
This is the path familiar to his foot
From infancy to manhood and old age;
For in a chamber of that ancient house
His eyes first opened on the mystery
Of life, and all the splendor of the world.
Here, as a child, in loving, curious way,
He watched the bluebird's coming; learned the date
Of hyacinth and goldenrod, and made
Friends of those little redmen of the elms,
And slyly added to their winter store
Of hazel-nuts: no harmless thing that breathed,
Footed or winged, but knew him for a friend.
The gilded butterfly was not afraid
To trust its gold to that so gentle hand,
The bluebird fled not from the pendent spray.
Ah, happy childhood, ringed with fortunate stars!
What dreams were his in this enchanted sphere,
What intuitions of high destiny!
The honey-bees of Hybla touched his lips
In that old New-World garden, unawares.

So in her arms did Mother Nature fold
Her poet, breathing what of strange and sweet
Into his ear — the state-affairs of birds,
The lore of dawn and sunset, what the wind
Said in the treetops — fine, unfathomed things
Henceforth to turn to music in his brain:

A various music, now like notes of flutes,
And now like blasts of trumpets blown in wars.
Later he paced this leafy academe
A student, drinking from Greek chalices
The ripened vintage of the antique world.
And here to him came love, and love's dear loss ;
Here honors came, the deep applause of men
Touched to the heart by some swift-wingèd word
That from his own full heart took eager flight —
Some strain of piercing sweetness or rebuke,
For underneath his gentle nature flamed
A noble scorn for all ignoble deed,
Himself a bondman till all men were free.

Thus passed his manhood ; then to other lands
He strayed, a stainless figure among courts
Beside the Manzanares and the Thames.
Whence, after too long exile, he returned
With fresher laurel, but sedater step
And eye more serious, fain to breathe the air
Where through the Cambridge marshes the blue
Charles
Uncoils its length and stretches to the sea :
Stream dear to him, at every curve a shrine
For pilgrim Memory. Again he watched
His loved syringa whitening by the door,
And knew the catbird's welcome ; in his walks
Smiled on his tawny kinsmen of the elms
Stealing his nuts ; and in the ruined year

Sat at his widowed hearthside with bent brows
Leonine, frosty with the breath of time,
And listened to the crooning of the wind
In the wide Elmwood chimneys, as of old.
And then — and then . .

The afterglow has faded from the elms,
And in the denser darkness of the boughs
From time to time the firefly's tiny lamp
Sparkles. How often in still summer dusks
He paused to note that transient phantom spark
Flash on the air — a light that outlasts him!

The night grows chill, as if it felt a breath
Blown from that frozen city where he lies.
All things turn strange. The leaf that rustles here
Has more than autumn's mournfulness. The place
Is heavy with his absence. Like fixed eyes
Whence the dear light of sense and thought has fled
The vacant windows stare across the lawn.
The wise sweet spirit that informed it all
Is otherwhere. The house itself is dead.

O autumn wind among the sombre pines,
Breathe you his dirge, but be it sweet and low,
With deep refrains and murmurs of the sea,
Like to his verse — the art is yours alone.

His once — you taught him. Now no voice but
yours.
Tender and low, O wind among the pines!

WHITE EDITH

Above an ancient book, with a knight's crest
In tarnished gold on either cover stamped,
She leaned, and read — a chronicle it was
In which the sound of hautboys stirred the pulse,
And masques and gilded pageants fed the eye.
Though here and there the vellum page was stained
Sanguine with battle, chiefly it was love
The stylus held — some wan-cheeked scribe, per-
chance,
That in a mouldy tower by candle-light
Forgot his hunger in his madrigals.
Outside was winter: in its winding-sheet
The frozen Year lay. Silent was the room,
Save when the wind against the casement pressed
Or a page rustled, turned impatiently,
Or when along the still damp apple-wood
A little flame ran that chirped like a bird —
Some wren's ghost haunting the familiar bough.

With parted lips, in which less color lived
Than paints the pale wild-rose, she leaned and
read.

From time to time her fingers unawares
Closed on the palm; and oft upon her cheek
The pallor died, and left such transient glow
As might from some rich chapel window fall
On a girl's cheek at prayer. So moved her soul,
From this dull age unshackled and divorced,
In far moon-haunted gardens of romance.
But once the wind that swept the palsied oaks,
As if new-pierced with sorrow, came and moaned
Close by the casement; then she raised her eyes,
The light of dreams still fringing them, and spoke:
"Tell me, good cousin, does this book say true?
Is it so fine a thing to be a queen?"

As if a spell of incantation dwelt
In those soft syllables, before me stood,
Colored like life, the phantasm of a maid
Who, in the savage childhood of this world,
Was crowned by error, or through dark intent
Made queen, and for the durance of one day
The royal diadem and ermine wore.
In strange sort wore — for this queen fed the starved,
The naked clothed, threw open dungeon doors;
Could to no story list of suffering
But the full tear was lovely on her lash;
Taught Grief to smile, and wan Despair to hope;
Upon her stainless bosom pillowed Sin
Repentant at her feet — like Him of old;

Made even the kerns and wild-men of the fells,
That sniffing pillage clamored at the gate,
Gentler than doves by some unknown white art,
And saying to herself, "So, I am Queen!"
With lip all tremulous, held out her hand
To the crowd's kiss. What joy to ease the hurt
Of bruisèd hearts! As in a trance she walked
That live-long day. Then night came, and the stars,
And blissful sleep. But ere the birds were called
By bluebell chimes (unheard of mortal ear)
To matins in their branch-hung priories —
Ere yet the dawn its gleaming edge lay bare
Like to the burnished axe's subtle edge,
She, from her sleep's caresses roughly torn,
The meek eyes blinking in the torches' glare,
Upon a scaffold for her glory paid
Her cheeks' two roses. For it so befell
That from the Northland there was come a prince,
With a great clash of shields and trailing spears
Through the black portals of the breathless night,
To claim the sceptre. He no less would take
Than those same roses for his usury.
What less, in faith! The throne was rightly his
Of that sea-girdled isle; so to the block
Needs go the ringlets and the white swan-throat
A touch of steel, a sudden darkness, then
Blue Heaven and all the hymning angel-choir!
No tears for her — keep tears for those who live

To mate with sin and shame, and have remorse
At last to light them to unhallowed earth.
Hers no such low-hung fortunes. Thus to stand
Supreme one instant at that dizzy height,
With no hoarse raven croaking in her ear
The certain doom, and then to have life's rose
Struck swiftly from the cheek, and so escape
Love's death, black treason, friend's ingratitude,
The pang of separation, chill of age,
The grief that in an empty cradle lies,
And all the unspoke sorrow women know —
That was, in truth, to have a happy reign!
Has thine been happier, Sovereign of the Sea,
In that long-mateless pilgrimage to death?
Or thine, whose beauty like a star illumed
Awhile the dark and angry sky of France,
Thy kingdom shrunken to two exiled graves?
Sweet old-world maid, a gentler fate was yours!
Would he had wed your story to his verse
Who from the misty land of legend brought
Helen of Troy to gladden English eyes.
There 's many a queen that lived her grandeur out,
Gray-haired and broken, might have envied you,
Your Majesty, that reigned a single day!

All this, between two heart-throbs, as it were,
Flashed through my mind, so lightning-like is thought.

With lifted eyes expectant, there she sat
Whose words had sent my fancy over-sea,
Her lip still trembling with its own soft speech,
As for a moment trembles the curved spray
Whence some winged melody has taken flight.
How every circumstance of time and place
Upon the glass of memory lives again! —
The bleak New England road; the level boughs
Like bars of iron across the setting sun;
The gray ribbed clouds piled up against the West;
The window splashed with frost; the firelit room,
And in the antique chair that slight girl-shape,
The auburn braid about the saintly brows
Making a nimbus, and she white as snow!

"Dear Heart," I said, "the humblest place is best
For gentle souls — the throne's foot, not the throne.
The storms that smite the dizzy solitudes
Where monarchs sit — most lonely folk are they! —
Oft leave the vale unscathed; there dwells content,
If so content have habitation here.
Never have I in annals read or rhyme
Of queen save one that found not at the end
The cup too bitter; never queen save one,
And she — her empire lasted but a day!
Yet that brief breath of time did she so fill
With mercy, love, and holy charity

As more rich made it than long-drawn-out years
Of such weed-life as drinks the lavish sun
And rots unflower'd." "Straight tell me of that queen!"
Cried Edith; "Brunhild, in my legend here,
Is lovely — was that other still more fair?
And had she not a Siegfried at the court
To steal her talisman? — that Siegfried did
At Günther's bidding. Was your queen not loved?
Tell me it all!" With chin upon her palm
Resting, she listened, and within her eyes
The sapphire deepened as I told the tale
Of the girl-empress in the dawn of Time —
A flower that on the vermeil brink of May
Died, with its folded whiteness for a shroud;
A strain of music that, ere it was mixed
With baser voices, floated up to heaven.

Without was silence, for the wind was spent
That all the day had pleaded at the door.
Against the crimson sunset elm and oak
Stood black and motionless; among the boughs
The sad wind slumbered. Silence filled the room,
Save when from out the crumbled apple branch
Came the wren's twitter, faint, and fainter now,
Like a bird's note far heard in twilight woods.
No other sound was. Presently a hand
Stole into mine, and rested there, inert,
Like some new-gathered snowy hyacinth,

So white and cold and delicate it was.
I know not what dark shadow crossed my heart,
What vague presentiment, but as I stooped
To lift the slender fingers to my lip,
I saw it through a mist of strangest tears —
The thin white hand invisible Death had touched!

SEA LONGINGS

The first world-sound that fell upon my ear
Was that of the great winds along the coast
Crushing the deep-sea beryl on the rocks —
The distant breakers' sullen cannonade.
Against the spires and gables of the town
The white fog drifted, catching here and there
At over-leaning cornice or peaked roof,
And hung — weird gonfalons. The garden walks
Were choked with leaves, and on their ragged biers
Lay dead the sweets of summer — damask rose,
Clove pink, old-fashioned, loved New England
flowers.
Only keen salt sea-odors filled the air.
Sea-sounds, sea-odors — these were all my world.

Hence is it that life languishes with me
Inland; the valleys stifle me with gloom
And pent-up prospect; in their narrow bound

Imagination flutters futile wings.
Vainly I seek the sloping pearl-white sand
And the mirage's phantom citadels
Miraculous, a moment seen, then gone.
Among the mountains I am ill at ease,
Missing the stretched horizon's level line
And the illimitable restless blue.
The crag-torn sky is not the sky I love,
But one unbroken sapphire spanning all;
And nobler than the branches of a pine
Aslant upon a mountain-torrent's brink
Are the strained spars of some great battle-ship
Ploughing across the sunset. No bird's lilt
So takes me as the whistling of the gale
Among the shrouds. My cradle-song was this,
Strange inarticulate sorrows of the sea,
Blithe rhythms upgathered from the Sirens' caves.
Perchance of earthly voices the last voice
That shall an instant my freed spirit stay
On this world's verge, will be some message blown
Over the dim salt lands that fringe the coast
At dusk, or when the trancèd midnight droops
With weight of stars, or haply just as dawn,
Illumining the sullen purple wave,
Turns the gray pools and willow-stems to gold.

THE BELLS AT MIDNIGHT[1]

In their dark House of Cloud
The three weird sisters toil till time be sped;
One unwinds life, one ever weaves the shroud,
One waits to part the thread.

I

CLOTHO

How long, O sister, how long
Ere the weary task is done?
How long, O sister, how long
Shall the fragile thread be spun?

LACHESIS

'T is mercy that stays her hand,
Else she had cut the thread;
She is a woman too,
Like her who kneels by his bed!

ATROPOS

Patience! the end is come;
He shall no more endure:
See! with a single touch! —
My hand is swift and sure!

[1] The death of President Garfield was announced at midnight by the tolling of church bells throughout the land.

II

Two Angels pausing in their flight

FIRST ANGEL

Listen! what was it fell
An instant ago on my ear —
A sound like the throb of a bell
From yonder darkling sphere.

SECOND ANGEL

The planet where mortals dwell!
I hear it not . . . yes, I hear;
How it deepens — a sound of dole!

FIRST ANGEL

Listen! It is the knell
Of a passing soul —
The midnight lamentation
Of some stricken nation
For a chieftain's soul!
It is just begun,
The many-throated moan . . .
Now the clangor swells
As if a million bells
Had blent their tones in one!
Accents of despair
Are these to mortal ear;
But all this wild funereal music blown

And sifted through celestial air
Turns to triumphal pæans here!
Wave upon wave the silvery anthems flow;
Wave upon wave the deep vibrations roll
From that dim sphere below.
Come, let us go —
Surely, some chieftain's soul!

UNGUARDED GATES

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
Named of the four winds, North, South, East, and West;
Portals that lead to an enchanted land
Of cities, forests, fields of living gold,
Vast prairies, lordly summits touched with snow,
Majestic rivers sweeping proudly past
The Arab's date-palm and the Norseman's pine —
A realm wherein are fruits of every zone,
Airs of all climes, for lo! throughout the year
The red rose blossoms somewhere — a rich land,
A later Eden planted in the wilds,
With not an inch of earth within its bound
But if a slave's foot press it sets him free.
Here, it is written, Toil shall have its wage,
And Honor honor, and the humblest man

Stand level with the highest in the law.
Of such a land have men in dungeons dreamed,
And with the vision brightening in their eyes
Gone smiling to the fagot and the sword.

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
And through them presses a wild motley throng —
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
Featureless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn;
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
In street and alley what strange tongues are loud,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!

O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well
To leave the gates unguarded? On thy breast
Fold Sorrow's children, soothe the hurts of fate,
Lift the down-trodden, but with hand of steel
Stay those who to thy sacred portals come
To waste the gifts of freedom. Have a care
Lest from thy brow the clustered stars be torn
And trampled in the dust. For so of old
The thronging Goth and Vandal trampled Rome,
And where the temples of the Cæsars stood
The lean wolf unmolested made her lair.

IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY

"The Southern Transept, hardly known by any other name but Poets' Corner." — Dean Stanley.

Tread softly here; the sacredest of tombs
Are those that hold your Poets. Kings and queens
Are facile accidents of Time and Chance.
Chance sets them on the heights, they climb not there!
But he who from the darkling mass of men
Is on the wing of heavenly thought upborne
To finer ether, and becomes a voice
For all the voiceless, God anointed him:
His name shall be a star, his grave a shrine.

Tread softly here, in silent reverence tread.
Beneath those marble cenotaphs and urns
Lies richer dust than ever nature hid
Packed in the mountain's adamantine heart,
Or slyly wrapped in unsuspected sand —
The dross men toil for, and oft stain the soul.
How vain and all ignoble seems that greed
To him who stands in this dim claustral air
With these most sacred ashes at his feet!
This dust was Chaucer, Spenser, Dryden this —
The spark that once illumed it lingers still.
O ever hallowed spot of English earth!
If the unleashed and happy spirit of man

Have option to revisit our dull globe,
What august Shades at midnight here convene
In the miraculous sessions of the moon,
When the great pulse of London faintly throbs,
And one by one the constellations pale!

A SHADOW OF THE NIGHT

Close on the edge of a midsummer dawn
In troubled dreams I went from land to land,
Each seven-colored like the rainbow's arc,
Regions where never fancy's foot had trod
Till then; yet all the strangeness seemed not strange,
At which I wondered, reasoning in my dream
With two-fold sense, well knowing that I slept.
At last I came to this our cloud-hung earth,
And somewhere by the seashore was a grave,
A woman's grave, new-made, and heaped with flowers;
And near it stood an ancient holy man
That fain would comfort me, who sorrowed not
For this unknown dead woman at my feet.
But I, because his sacred office held
My reverence, listened; and 't was thus he spake:
"When next thou comest thou shalt find her still
In all the rare perfection that she was.

Thou shalt have gentle greeting of thy love!
Her eyelids will have turned to violets,
Her bosom to white lilies, and her breath
To roses. What is lovely never dies,
But passes into other loveliness,
Star-dust, or sea-foam, flower, or wingèd air.
If this befalls our poor unworthy flesh,
Think thee what destiny awaits the soul!
What glorious vesture it shall wear at last!"
While yet he spoke, seashore and grave and priest,
Vanished, and faintly from a neighboring spire
Fell five slow solemn strokes upon my ear.
Then I awoke with a keen pain at heart,
A sense of swift unutterable loss,
And through the darkness reached my hand to touch
Her cheek, soft pillowed on one restful palm —
To be quite sure!

THE LAST CÆSAR

1851–1870

I

Now there was one who came in later days
To play at Emperor: in the dead of night
Stole crown and sceptre, and stood forth to light
In sudden purple. The dawn's straggling rays

Showed Paris fettered, murmuring in amaze,
With red hands at her throat — a piteous sight.
Then the new Cæsar, stricken with affright
At his own daring, shrank from public gaze

In the Elysée, and had lost the day
But that around him flocked his birds of prey,
Sharp-beaked, voracious, hungry for the deed.
'Twixt hope and fear behold great Cæsar hang;
Meanwhile, methinks, a ghostly laughter rang
Through the rotunda of the Invalides.

II

What if the boulevards, at the set of sun,
Reddened, but not with sunset's kindly glow?
What if from quai and square the murmured woe
Swept heavenward, pleadingly? The prize was won,
A kingling made and Liberty undone.
No Emperor, this, like him a while ago,
But his Name's shadow; that one struck the blow
Himself, and sighted the street-sweeping gun!

This was a man of tortuous heart and brain,
So warped he knew not his own point of view —
The master of a dark, mysterious smile.
And there he plotted, by the storied Seine
And in the fairy gardens of St. Cloud,
The Sphinx that puzzled Europe, for a while.

III

I see him as men saw him once — a face
Of true Napoleon pallor; round the eyes
The wrinkled care; moustache spread pinion-wise,
Pointing his smile with odd sardonic grace
As wearily he turns him in his place,
And bends before the hoarse Parisian cries —
Then vanishes, with glitter of gold-lace
And trumpets blaring to the patient skies.

Not thus he vanished later! On his path
The Furies waited for the hour and man,
Foreknowing that they waited not in vain.
Then fell the day, O day of dreadful wrath!
Bow down in shame, O crimson-girt Sedan!
Weep, fair Alsace! weep, loveliest Lorraine!

So mused I, sitting underneath the trees
In that old garden of the Tuileries,
Watching the dust of twilight sifting down
Through chestnut boughs just touched with autumn's brown —
Not twilight yet, but that illusive bloom
Which holds before the deep-etched shadows come;
For still the garden stood in golden mist,
Still, like a river of molten amethyst,
The Seine slipped through its spans of fretted stone,

And near the grille that once fenced in a throne,
The fountains still unbraided to the day
The unsubstantial silver of their spray.
A spot to dream in, love in, waste one's hours!
Temples and palaces, and gilded towers,
And fairy terraces! — and yet, and yet
Here in her woe came Marie Antoinette,
Came sweet Corday, Du Barry with shrill cry,
Not learning from her betters how to die!
Here, while the Nations watched with bated breath,
Was held the saturnalia of Red Death!
For where that slim Egyptian shaft uplifts
Its point to catch the dawn's and sunset's drifts
Of various gold, the busy Headsman stood. . . .
Place de la Concorde — no, the Place of Blood!

And all so peaceful now! One cannot bring
Imagination to accept the thing.
Lies, all of it! some dreamer's wild romance —
High-hearted, witty, laughter-loving France!
In whose brain was it that the legend grew
Of Mænads shrieking in this avenue,
Of watch-fires burning, Famine standing guard,
Of long-speared Uhlans in that palace-yard!
What ruder sound this soft air ever smote
Than a bird's twitter or a bugle's note?
What darker crimson ever splashed these walks
Than that of rose-leaves dropping from the stalks?

And yet — what means that charred and broken
wall,
That sculptured marble, splintered, like to fall,
Looming among the trees there? . . . And you
say
This happened, as it were, but yesterday?
And here the Commune stretched a barricade,
And there the final desperate stand was made?
Such things have been? How all things change
and fade!
How little lasts in this brave world below!
Love dies; hate cools; the Cæsars come and go;
Gaunt Hunger fattens, and the weak grow strong.
Even Republics are not here for long!

Ah, who can tell what hour may bring the doom,
The lighted torch, the tocsin's heavy boom!

TENNYSON

I

Shakespeare and Milton — what third blazoned
name
Shall lips of after-ages link to these?
His who, beside the wild encircling seas,
Was England's voice, her voice with one acclaim,

For threescore years; whose word of praise was fame,
Whose scorn gave pause to man's iniquities.

II

What strain was his in that Crimean war?
A bugle-call in battle; a low breath,
Plaintive and sweet, above the fields of death!
So year by year the music rolled afar,
From Euxine wastes to flowery Kandahar,
Bearing the laurel or the cypress wreath.

III

Others shall have their little space of time,
Their proper niche and bust, then fade away
Into the darkness, poets of a day;
But thou, O builder of enduring rhyme,
Thou shalt not pass! Thy fame in every clime
On earth shall live where Saxon speech has sway.

IV

Waft me this verse across the winter sea,
Through light and dark, through mist and blinding sleet,
O winter winds, and lay it at his feet;

Though the poor gift betray my poverty,
At his feet lay it: it may chance that he
Will find no gift, where reverence is, unmeet.

ALEC YEATON'S SON

GLOUCESTER, AUGUST, 1720

THE wind it wailed, the wind it moaned,
And the white caps flecked the sea;
"An' I would to God," the skipper groaned,
"I had not my boy with me!"

Snug in the stern-sheets, little John
Laughed as the scud swept by;
But the skipper's sunburnt cheek grew wan
As he watched the wicked sky.

"Would he were at his mother's side!"
And the skipper's eyes were dim.
"Good Lord in heaven, if ill betide,
What would become of him!

"For me — my muscles are as steel,
For me let hap what may:
I might make shift upon the keel
Until the break o' day.

"But he, he is so weak and small,
So young, scarce learned to stand —
O pitying Father of us all,
I trust him in Thy hand!

"For Thou, who markest from on high
A sparrow's fall — each one! —
Surely, O Lord, thou 'lt have an eye
On Alec Yeaton's son!"

Then, steady, helm! Right straight he sailed
Towards the headland light:
The wind it moaned, the wind it wailed,
And black, black fell the night.

Then burst a storm to make one quail
Though housed from winds and waves —
They who could tell about that gale
Must rise from watery graves!

Sudden it came, as sudden went;
Ere half the night was sped,
The winds were hushed, the waves were spent,
And the stars shone overhead.

Now, as the morning mist grew thin,
The folk on Gloucester shore
Saw a little figure floating in
Secure, on a broken oar!

Up rose the cry, "A wreck! a wreck!
Pull, mates, and waste no breath!" —
They knew it, though 't was but a speck
Upon the edge of death!

Long did they marvel in the town
At God His strange decree,
That let the stalwart skipper drown
And the little child go free!

BATUSCHKA [1]

From yonder gilded minaret
Beside the steel-blue Neva set,
I faintly catch, from time to time,
The sweet, aerial midnight chime —
"God save the Tsar!"

Above the ravelins and the moats
Of the white citadel it floats;
And men in dungeons far beneath
Listen, and pray, and gnash their teeth —
"God save the Tsar!"

[1] "Little Father," or "Dear Little Father," a term of endearment applied to the Tsar in Russian folk-song.

The soft reiterations sweep
Across the horror of their sleep,
As if some demon in his glee
Were mocking at their misery —
"God save the Tsar!"

In his Red Palace over there,
Wakeful, he needs must hear the prayer.
How can it drown the broken cries
Wrung from his children's agonies? —
"God save the Tsar!"

Father they called him from of old —
Batuschka! . . . How his heart is cold!
Wait till a million scourgèd men
Rise in their awful might, and then —
God save the Tsar!

MONODY ON THE DEATH OF WENDELL PHILLIPS

I

One by one they go
Into the unknown dark —
Starlit brows of the brave,
Voices that drew men's souls.

Rich is the land, O Death!
Can give you dead like our dead! —
Such as he from whose hand
The magic web of romance
Slipped, and the art was lost!
Such as he who erewhile —
The last of the Titan brood —
With his thunder the Senate shook;
Or he who, beside the Charles,
Untouched of envy or hate,
Tranced the world with his song;
Or that other, that gray-eyed seer
Who in pastoral Concord ways
With Plato and Hâfiz walked.

II

Not of these was the man
Whose wraith, through the mists of night,
Through the shuddering wintry stars,
Has passed to eternal morn.
Fit were the moan of the sea
And the clashing of cloud on cloud
For the passing of that soul!
Ever he faced the storm!
No weaver of rare romance,
No patient framer of laws,
No maker of wondrous rhyme,
No bookman wrapped in his dream.

His was the voice that rang
In the fight like a bugle-call,
And yet could be tender and low
As when, on a night in June,
The hushed wind sobs in the pines.
His was the eye that flashed
With a sabre's azure gleam,
Pointing to heights unwon!

III

Not for him were these days
Of clerkly and sluggish calm —
To the petrel the swooping gale!
Austere he seemed, but the hearts
Of all men beat in his breast;
No fetter but galled his wrist,
No wrong that was not his own.
What if those eloquent lips
Curled with the old-time scorn?
What if in needless hours
His quick hand closed on the hilt?
'T was the smoke from the well-won fields
That clouded the veteran's eyes.
A fighter this to the end.

Ah, if in coming times
Some giant evil arise,

And Honor falter and pale,
His were a name to conjure with!
God send his like again!

TWO MOODS

I

Between the budding and the falling leaf
Stretch happy skies;
With colors and sweet cries
Of mating birds in uplands and in glades
The world is rife.
Then on a sudden all the music dies,
The color fades.
How fugitive and brief
Is mortal life
Between the budding and the falling leaf!

O short-breathed music, dying on the tongue
Ere half the mystic canticle be sung!
O harp of life, so speedily unstrung!
Who, if 't were his to choose, would know again
The bitter sweetness of the lost refrain,
Its rapture, and its pain?

II

Though I be shut in darkness, and become
Insentient dust blown idly here and there,
I count oblivion a scant price to pay
For having once had held against my lip
Life's brimming cup of hydromel and rue —
For having once known woman's holy love
And a child's kiss, and for a little space
Been boon companion to the Day and Night,
Fed on the odors of the summer dawn,
And folded in the beauty of the stars.
Dear Lord, though I be changed to senseless clay,
And serve the potter as he turns his wheel,
I thank Thee for the gracious gift of tears!

THE SHIPMAN'S TALE

Listen, my masters! I speak naught but truth.
From dawn to dawn they drifted on and on,
Not knowing whither nor to what dark end.
Now the North froze them, now the hot South scorched.
Some called to God, and found great comfort so;
Some gnashed their teeth with curses, and some laughed
An empty laughter, seeing they yet lived,

So sweet was breath between their foolish lips.
Day after day the same relentless sun,
Night after night the same unpitying stars.
At intervals fierce lightnings tore the clouds,
Showing vast hollow spaces, and the sleet
Hissed, and the torrents of the sky were loosed.
From time to time a hand relaxed its grip,
And some pale wretch slid down into the dark
With stifled moan, and transient horror seized
The rest who waited, knowing what must be.
At every turn strange shapes reached up and clutched
The whirling wreck, held on awhile, and then
Slipped back into that blackness whence they came.
Ah, hapless folk, to be so tossed and torn,
So racked by hunger, fever, fire, and wave,
And swept at last into the nameless void —
Frail girls, strong men, and mothers with their babes!

And was none saved?

My masters, not a soul!

O shipman, woful, woful is thy tale!
Our hearts are heavy and our eyes are dimmed.
What ship is this that suffered such ill fate?

What ship, my masters? Know ye not? — The World!

BROKEN MUSIC

A note
All out of tune in this world's instrument.
AMY LEVY.

I KNOW not in what fashion she was made,
Nor what her voice was, when she used to speak,
Nor if the silken lashes threw a shade
On wan or rosy cheek.

I picture her with sorrowful vague eyes
Illumed with such strange gleams of inner light
As linger in the drift of London skies
Ere twilight turns to night.

I know not; I conjecture. 'T was a girl
That with her own most gentle desperate hand
From out God's mystic setting plucked life's pearl —
'T is hard to understand.

So precious life is! Even to the old
The hours are as a miser's coins, and she —
Within her hands lay youth's unminted gold
And all felicity.

The winged impetuous spirit, the white flame
That was her soul once, whither has it flown?
Above her brow gray lichens blot her name
Upon the carven stone.

This is her Book of Verses — wren-like notes,
Shy franknesses, blind gropings, haunting fears ;
At times across the chords abruptly floats
A mist of passionate tears.

A fragile lyre too tensely keyed and strung,
A broken music, weirdly incomplete :
Here a proud mind, self-baffled and self-stung,
Lies coiled in dark defeat.

THE SAILING OF THE AUTOCRAT

ON BOARD THE S. S. CEPHALONIA
April 26, 1886

I

O Wind and Wave, be kind to him!
So, Wave and Wind, we give thee thanks!
O Fog, that from Newfoundland Banks
Makest the blue bright ocean dim,
Delay him not! And ye who snare
The wayworn shipman with your song,
Go pipe your ditties otherwhere
While this brave vessel ploughs along!
If still to lure him hold your thought,
O phantoms of the watery zone,
Be wary, lest yourselves get caught
With music sweeter than your own!

II

Yet, soft sea spirits, be not mute;
Murmur about the prow, and make
Melodious the west wind's lute.
For him may radiant mornings break
From out the bosom of the deep,
And golden noons above him bend,
And kindly constellations keep
Bright vigils to his journey's end!

III

Take him, green Erin, to thy breast!
Keep him, dark London — for a while!
In him we send thee of our best,
Our wisest word, our blithest smile —
Our epigram, alert and pat,
That kills with joy the folly hit —
Our Yankee Tsar, our Autocrat
Of all the happy realms of wit!
Take him and keep him — but forbear
To keep him more than half a year. . . .
His presence will be sunshine there,
His absence will be shadow here!

October 7, 1894

"His absence will be shadow here"—
A deeper shadow than I meant

Has fallen on the waning year
And with my lightsome verses blent.
Another voyage was to be! —
The ship that bears him now from shore,
To plough an unknown, chartless sea,
Shall bring him back to us no more!

AT THE FUNERAL OF A MINOR POET

One of the Bearers soliloquises:

. . . Room in your heart for him, O Mother Earth,
Who loved each flower and leaf that made you fair,
And sang your praise in verses manifold
And delicate, with here and there a line
From end to end in blossom like a bough
The May breathes on, so rich it was. Some thought
The workmanship more costly than the thing
Moulded or carved, as in those ornaments
Found at Mycenæ. And yet Nature's self
Works in this wise; upon a blade of grass,
Or what small note she lends the woodland thrush,
Lavishing endless patience. He was born
Artist, not artisan, which some few saw
And many dreamed not. As he wrote no odes
When Crœsus wedded or Mæcenas died,
And gave no breath to civic feasts and shows,

He missed the glare that gilds more facile men —
A twilight poet, groping quite alone,
Belated, in a sphere where every nest
Is emptied of its music and its wings.
Not great his gift; yet we can poorly spare
Even his slight perfection in an age
Of limping triolets and tame rondeaux.
He had at least ideals, though unreached,
And heard, far off, immortal harmonies,
Such as fall coldly on our ear to-day.
The mighty Zolaistic Movement now
Engrosses us — a miasmatic breath
Blown from the slums. We paint life as it is,
The hideous side of it, with careful pains,
Making a god of the dull Commonplace.
For have we not the old gods overthrown
And set up strangest idols? We would clip
Imagination's wing and kill delight,
Our sole art being to leave nothing out
That renders art offensive. Not for us
Madonnas leaning from their starry thrones
Ineffable, nor any heaven-wrought dream
Of sculptor or of poet; we prefer
Such nightmare visions as in morbid brains
Take form and substance, thoughts that taint the air
And make all life unlovely. Will it last?
Beauty alone endures from age to age,

From age to age endures, handmaid of God.
Poets who walk with her on earth go hence
Bearing a talisman. You bury one,
With his hushed music, in some Potter's Field;
The snows and rains blot out his very name,
As he from life seems blotted: through Time's glass
Slip the invisible and silent sands
That mark the century, then falls a day
The world is suddenly conscious of a flower,
Imperishable, ever to be prized,
Sprung from the mould of a forgotten grave.
'T is said the seeds wrapped up among the balms
And hieroglyphics of Egyptian kings
Hold strange vitality, and, planted, grow
After the lapse of thrice a thousand years.
Some day, perchance, some unregarded note
Of this dead Singer — some sweet minor chord
That failed to lure our more accustomed ear —
Shall wake to life, like those long buried seeds,
And witch the fancy of an unborn age.
Meanwhile he sleeps, with scantiest laurel won
And little of our Nineteenth Century gold.
So, take him, Earth, and this his mortal part,
With that shrewd alchemy thou hast, transmute
To flower and leaf in thine unending Springs!

SARGENT'S PORTRAIT OF EDWIN BOOTH AT "THE PLAYERS"

1891

THAT face which no man ever saw
And from his memory banished quite,
With eyes in which are Hamlet's awe
And Cardinal Richelieu's subtle light
Looks from this frame. A master's hand
Has set the master-player here,
In the fair temple [1] that he planned
Not for himself. To us most dear
This image of him! "It was thus
He looked; such pallor touched his cheek;
With that same grace he greeted us —
Nay, 't is the man, could it but speak!"
Sad words that shall be said some day —
Far fall the day! O cruel Time,
Whose breath sweeps mortal things away,
Spare long this image of his prime,
That others standing in the place
Where, save as ghosts, we come no more,
May know what sweet majestic face
The gentle Prince of Players wore!

[1] The club-house in Gramercy Park, New York, was the gift of Mr. Booth to the association founded by him and named "The Players."

"WHEN FROM THE TENSE CHORDS OF THAT MIGHTY LYRE"

JANUARY, 1892

I

WHEN from the tense chords of that mighty lyre
The Master's hand, relaxing, falls away,
And those rich strings are silent for all time,
Then shall Love pine, and Passion lack her fire,
And Faith seem voiceless. Man to man shall say,
"Dead is the last of England's lords of rhyme."

II

Yet — stay! there 's one, a later laurelled brow,
With purple blood of poets in his veins;
Him has the Muse claimed; him might Marlowe own;
Greek Sappho's son! — men's praises seek him now.
Happy the realm where one such voice remains!
His the dropped wreath and the unenvied throne.

III

The wreath the world gives, not the mimic wreath
That chance might make the gift of king or queen.
O finder of undreamed-of harmonies !
Since Shelley's lips were hushed by cruel death,
What lyric voice so sweet as this has been
Blown to us on the winds from over seas ?

PAULINE PAVLOVNA

SCENE: St. Petersburg. Period: the present time. A ballroom in the winter palace of the Prince ——. The ladies in character costumes and masks. The gentlemen in official dress and unmasked, with the exception of six tall figures in scarlet kaftans, who are treated with marked distinction as they move here and there among the promenaders. Quadrille music throughout the dialogue.

COUNT SERGIUS PAVLOVICH PANSHINE, who has just arrived, is standing anxiously in the doorway of an antechamber with his eyes fixed upon a lady in the costume of a maid of honor in the time of Catharine II. The lady presently disengages herself from the crowd, and passes near COUNT PANSHINE, who impulsively takes her by the hand and leads her across the threshold of the inner apartment, which is unoccupied.

HE

Pauline!

SHE

You knew me?

HE

How could I have failed?
A mask may hide your features, not your soul.

There is an air about you like the air
That folds a star. A blind man knows the night,
And feels the constellations. No coarse sense
Of eye or ear had made you plain to me.
Through these I had not found you; for your eyes,
As blue as violets of our Novgorod,
Look black behind your mask there, and your voice —
I had not known that either. My heart said,
"Pauline Pavlovna."

SHE

Ah! Your heart said that?
You trust your heart, then! 'T is a serious risk! —
How is it you and others wear no mask?

HE

The Emperor's orders.

SHE

Is the Emperor here?
I have not seen him.

HE

He is one of the six
In scarlet kaftans and all masked alike.
Watch — you will note how every one bows down
Before those figures, thinking each by chance
May be the Tsar; yet none knows which is he.

Pauline Pavlovna and Count Panshine

Even his counterparts are left in doubt.
Unhappy Russia! No serf ever wore
Such chains as gall our Emperor these sad days.
He dare trust no man.

SHE

All men are so false.

HE

Save one, Pauline Pavlovna.

SHE

No; all, all!
I think there is no truth left in the world,
In man or woman. Once were noble souls. —
Count Sergius, is Nastasia here to-night?

HE

Ah! then you know! I thought to tell you first.
Not here, beneath these hundred curious eyes,
In all this glare of light; but in some place
Where I could throw me at your feet and weep.
In what shape came the story to your ear?
Decked in the teller's colors, I 'll be sworn;
The truth, but in the livery of a lie,
And so must wrong me. Only this is true:
The Tsar, because I risked my wretched life
To shield a life as wretched as my own,
Bestows upon me, as supreme reward —

O irony! — the hand of this poor girl.
He stayed me at the bottom of a stair,
And said, *We have the pearl of pearls for you,*
Such as from out the sea was never plucked
By Indian diver, for a Sultan's crown.
Your joy's decreed, and stabbed me with a smile.

SHE

And she — she loves you?

HE

I much question that.
Likes me, perhaps. What matters it? — her love!
The guardian, Sidor Yurievich, consents,
And she consents. Love weighs not in such scales —
A mere caprice, a young girl's springtide dream.
Sick of her ear-rings, weary of her mare,
She'll have a lover, something ready-made,
Or improvised between two cups of tea —
A lover by imperial ukase!
Fate said her word — I chanced to be the man!
If that grenade the crazy student threw
Had not spared me, as well as spared the Tsar,
All this would not have happened. I'd have been
A hero, but quite safe from her romance.
She takes me for a hero — think of that!
Now by our holy Lady of Kazan,
When I have finished pitying myself,
I'll pity her.

SHE

Oh no; begin with her;
She needs it most.

HE

At her door lies the blame,
Whatever falls. She, with a single word,
With half a tear, had stopped it at the first,
This cruel juggling with poor human hearts.

SHE

The Tsar commanded it — you said the Tsar.

HE

The Tsar does what she wishes — God knows why.
Were she his mistress, now! but there 's no snow
Whiter within the bosom of a cloud,
Nor colder either. She is very haughty,
For all her fragile air of gentleness;
With something vital in her, like those flowers
That on our desolate steppes outlast the year.
Resembles you in some things. It was that
First made us friends. I do her justice, mark.
For we were friends in that smooth surface way
We Russians have imported out of France —
Forgetting Alma and Sevastopol.
Alas! from what a blue and tranquil heaven
This bolt fell on me! After these two years,
My suit with Alexandrovitch at end,

The old wrong righted, the estates restored,
And my promotion, with the ink not dry!
Those fairies which neglected me at birth
Seemed now to lavish all good gifts on me —
Gold roubles, office, sudden dearest friends.
The whole world smiled; then, as I stooped to taste
The sweetest cup, freak dashed it from my lip.
This very night — just think, this very night —
I planned to come and beg of you the alms
I dared not ask for in my poverty.
I thought me poor then. How stripped am I now!
There 's not a ragged mendicant one meets
Along the Nevski Prospekt but has leave
To tell his love, and I have not that right!
Pauline Pavlovna, why do you stand there
Stark as a statue, with no word to say?

SHE

Because this thing has frozen up my heart.
I think that there is something killed in me,
A dream that would have mocked all other bliss.
What shall I say? What would you have me say?

HE

If it be possible, the word of words!

SHE, *very slowly*

Well, then — I love you. I may tell you so
This once, . . . and then for ever hold my peace.

We cannot longer stay here unobserved.
No — do not touch me ! but stand farther off,
And seem to laugh, as if we talked in jest,
Should we be watched. Now turn your face away.
I love you.

HE

With such music in my ears
I would death found me. It were sweet to die
Listening ! You love me — prove it.

SHE

Prove it — how ?
I prove it saying it. How else ?

HE

Pauline,
I have three things to choose from ; you shall choose :
This marriage, or Siberia, or France.
The first means hell ; the second, purgatory ;
The third — with you — were nothing less than heaven !

SHE, *starting*

How dared you even dream it !

HE

I was mad.

This business has touched me in the brain.
Have patience! the calamity is new. [*Pauses*
There is a fourth way; but that gate is shut
To brave men who hold life a thing of God.

SHE

Yourself spoke there; the rest was not of you.

HE

Oh, lift me to your level! Where you move
The air is temperate, and no pulses beat.
What's to be done?

SHE

I lack invention — stay,
Perhaps the Emperor —

HE

Not a shred of hope!
His mind is set on this with that insistence
Which seems to seize on all match-making folk.
The fancy bites them, and they straight go mad.

SHE

Your father's friend, the Metropolitan —
A word from him . . .

HE

Alas, he too is bitten!

Gray-haired, gray-hearted, worldly wise, he sees
This marriage makes me the Tsar's protégé,
And opens every door to preference.

SHE

Then let him be. There surely is some way
Out of the labyrinth, could we but find it.
Nastasia!

HE

What! beg life of her? Not I.

SHE

Beg love. She is a woman, young, perhaps
Untouched as yet of this too poisonous air.
Were she told all, would she not pity us?
For if she love you, as I think she must,
Would not some generous impulse stir in her,
Some latent, unsuspected spark illume?
How love thrills even commonest girl-clay,
Ennobling it an instant, if no more!
You said that she is proud; then touch her pride,
And turn her into marble with the touch.
But yet the gentler passion is the stronger.
Go to her, tell her, in some tenderest phrase
That will not hurt too much — ah, but 't will hurt! —
Just how your happiness lies in her hand
To make or mar for all time; hint, not say,
Your heart is gone from you, and you may find —

HE

A casemate in St. Peter and St. Paul
For, say, a month; then some Siberian town.
Not this way lies escape. At my first word
That sluggish Tartar blood would turn to fire
In every vein.

SHE

How blindly you read her,
Or any woman! Yes, I know. I grant
How small we often seem in our small world
Of trivial cares and narrow precedents —
Lacking that wide horizon stretched for men —
Capricious, spiteful, frightened at a mouse;
But when it comes to suffering mortal pangs,
The weakest of us measures pulse with you.

HE

Yes, you, not she. If she were at your height!
But there 's no martyr wrapped in *her* rose flesh.
There should have been; for Nature gave you both
The self-same purple for your eyes and hair,
The self-same Southern music to your lips,
Fashioned you both, as 't were, in the same mould,
Yet failed to put the soul in one of you!
I know her wilful — her light head quite turned
In this court atmosphere of flatteries;
A Moscow beauty, petted and spoiled there,
And since spoiled here; as soft as swan's-down now,

With words like honey melting from the comb,
But being crossed, vindictive, cruel, cold.
I fancy her, between two languid smiles,
Saying, " Poor fellow, in the Nertchinsk mines ! "
I know her pitiless.

SHE

You know her not.
Count Sergius Pavlovich, you said no mask
Could hide the soul, yet how you have mistaken
The soul these two months — and the face to-night !

[*Removes her mask*

HE

You ! — it was *you !*

SHE

Count Sergius Pavlovich,
Go find Pauline Pavlovna — she is here —
And tell her that the Tsar has set you free.

[*She goes out hurriedly, replacing her mask*

INTERLUDES

PRESCIENCE

The new moon hung in the sky,
  The sun was low in the west,
And my betrothed and I
  In the churchyard paused to rest —
    Happy maiden and lover,
    Dreaming the old dream over:
The light winds wandered by,
  And robins chirped from the nest.

And lo! in the meadow-sweet
  Was the grave of a little child,
With a crumbling stone at the feet,
  And the ivy running wild —
    Tangled ivy and clover
    Folding it over and over:
Close to my sweetheart's feet
  Was the little mound up-piled.

Stricken with nameless fears,
  She shrank and clung to me,

And her eyes were filled with tears
For a sorrow I did not see:
Lightly the winds were blowing,
Softly her tears were flowing —
Tears for the unknown years
And a sorrow that was to be!

MEMORY

My mind lets go a thousand things,
Like dates of wars and deaths of kings,
And yet recalls the very hour —
'T was noon by yonder village tower,
And on the last blue noon in May —
The wind came briskly up this way,
Crisping the brook beside the road;
Then, pausing here, set down its load
Of pine-scents, and shook listlessly
Two petals from that wild-rose tree.

A MOOD

A BLIGHT, a gloom, I know not what, has crept
upon my gladness —
Some vague, remote ancestral touch of sorrow, or
of madness;

A fear that is not fear, a pain that has not pain's
insistence;
A sense of longing, or of loss, in some foregone
existence;
A subtle hurt that never pen has writ nor tongue
has spoken —
Such hurt perchance as Nature feels when a blos-
somed bough is broken.

ACT V

[Midnight]

First, two white arms that held him very close,
And ever closer as he drew him back
Reluctantly, the unbound golden hair
A thousand delicate fibres reaching out
Still to detain him; then some twenty steps
Of iron staircase winding round and down,
And ending in a narrow gallery hung
With Gobelin tapestries — Andromeda
Rescued by Perseus, and the sleek Diana
With her nymphs bathing; at the farther end
A door that gave upon a starlit grove
Of citron and dwarf cypress; then a path
As bleached as moonlight, with the shadow of leaves

Stamped black upon it; next a vine-clad length
Of solid masonry; and last of all
A Gothic archway packed with night, and then —
A sudden gleaming dagger through his heart.

GUILIELMUS REX

The folk who lived in Shakespeare's day
And saw that gentle figure pass
By London Bridge, his frequent way —
They little knew what man he was.

The pointed beard, the courteous mien,
The equal port to high and low,
All this they saw or might have seen —
But not the light behind the brow!

The doublet's modest gray or brown,
The slender sword-hilt's plain device,
What sign had these for prince or clown?
Few turned, or none, to scan him twice.

Yet 't was the king of England's kings!
The rest with all their pomps and trains
Are mouldered, half-remembered things —
'T is he alone that lives and reigns!

A DEDICATION

Take these rhymes into thy grace,
  Since they are of thy begetting,
Lady, that dost make each place
  Where thou art a jewel's setting.

Some such glamour lend this Book:
  Let it be thy poet's wages
That henceforth thy gracious look
  Lies reflected on its pages.

"PILLARED ARCH AND SCULPTURED TOWER"

Pillared arch and sculptured tower
Of Ilium have had their hour;
The dust of many a king is blown
On the winds from zone to zone;
Many a warrior sleeps unknown.
Time and Death hold each in thrall,
Yet is Love the lord of all;
Still does Helen's beauty stir
Because a poet sang of her!

THRENODY

H. H. B.

I

Upon your hearse this flower I lay.
Brief be your sleep! You shall be known
When lesser men have had their day;
Fame blossoms where true seed is sown,
Or soon or late, let Time wrong what it may.

II

Unvexed by any dream of fame,
You smiled, and bade the world pass by;
But I — I turned, and saw a name
Shaping itself against the sky —
White star that rose amid the battle's flame!

III

Brief be your sleep, for I would see
Your laurels — ah, how trivial now
To him must earthly laurel be
Who wears the amaranth on his brow!
How vain the voices of mortality!

SESTET

(Sent to a friend with a volume of Tennyson)

WOULDST know the clash of knightly steel on steel?
Or list the throstle singing loud and clear?
Or walk at twilight by some haunted mere
In Surrey; or in throbbing London feel
Life's pulse at highest — hark, the minster's peal! . . .
Turn but the page, that various world is here!

NECROMANCY

THROUGH a chance fissure of the churchyard wall
A creeping vine puts forth a single spray,
At whose slim end a starry blossom droops
Full to the soft vermilion of a rose
That reaches up on tiptoe for the kiss.
Not them the wren disturbs, nor the loud bee
That buzzes homeward with his load of sweets;
And thus they linger, flowery lip to lip,
Heedless of all, in rapturous mute embrace.
Some necromancy here! These two, I think,
Were once unhappy lovers upon earth.

FOREVER AND A DAY

SONG

I

I LITTLE know or care
If the blackbird on the bough
Is filling all the air
With his soft crescendo now;
For she is gone away,
And when she went she took
The springtime in her look,
The peachblow on her cheek,
The laughter from the brook,
The blue from out the May —
And what she calls a week
Is forever and a day!

II

It 's little that I mind
How the blossoms, pink or white,
At every touch of wind
Fall a-trembling with delight;
For in the leafy lane,
Beneath the garden-boughs,
And through the silent house
One thing alone I seek.

Until she come again
The May is not the May,
And what she calls a week
Is forever and a day!

A TOUCH OF NATURE

When first the crocus thrusts its point of gold
Up through the still snow-drifted garden mould,
And folded green things in dim woods unclose
Their crinkled spears, a sudden tremor goes
Into my veins and makes me kith and kin
To every wild-born thing that thrills and blows.
Sitting beside this crumbling sea-coal fire,
Here in the city's ceaseless roar and din,
Far from the brambly paths I used to know,
Far from the rustling brooks that slip and shine
Where the Neponset alders take their glow,
I share the tremulous sense of bud and brier
And inarticulate ardors of the vine.

"I'LL NOT CONFER WITH SORROW"

I'll not confer with Sorrow
Till to-morrow;
But Joy shall have her way
This very day.

Ho, eglantine and cresses
For her tresses! —
Let Care, the beggar, wait
Outside the gate.

Tears if you will — but after
Mirth and laughter;
Then, folded hands on breast
And endless rest.

IN THE BELFRY OF THE NIEUWE KERK

(AMSTERDAM)

Not a breath in the stifled, dingy street!
On the Stadhuis tiles the sun's deep glow
Lies like a kind of golden snow;
In the square one almost sees the heat.
The mottled tulips over there
By the open casement pant for air.
Grave, portly burghers, with their *vrouws*,
Go hat in hand to cool their brows.

But high in the fretted steeple, where
The sudden chimes burst forth and scare
The lazy rooks from the belfry rail,
Up here, behold! there blows a gale —

Such a wind as bends the forest tree,
And rocks the great ships out at sea!

Plain simple folk, who come and go
On humble levels of life below,
Little dream of the gales that smite
Mortals dwelling upon the height.

NO SONGS IN WINTER

The sky is gray as gray may be,
There is no bird upon the bough,
There is no leaf on vine or tree.

In the Neponset marshes now
Willow-stems, rosy in the wind,
Shiver with hidden sense of snow.

So too 't is winter in my mind,
No light-winged fancy comes and stays:
A season churlish and unkind.

Slow creep the hours, slow creep the days,
The black ink crusts upon the pen —
Wait till the bluebirds and the jays
And golden orioles come again!

A PARABLE

One went East, and one went West
Across the wild sea-foam,
And both were on the self-same quest.
Now one there was who cared for naught
So stayed at home:
Yet of the three 't was only he
Who reached the goal — by him unsought.

INSOMNIA

Slumber, hasten down this way,
And, ere midnight dies,
Silence lay upon my lips,
Darkness on my eyes.

Send me a fantastic dream;
Fashion me afresh;
Into some celestial thing
Change this mortal flesh.

Well I know one may not choose;
One is helpless still
In the purple realm of Sleep:
Use me as you will.

Let me be a frozen pine
In dead glacier lands;
Let me pant, a leopard stretched
On the Libyan sands.

Silver fin or scarlet wing
Grant me, either one;
Sink me deep in emerald glooms,
Lift me to the sun.

Or of me a gargoyle make,
Face of ape or gnome,
Such as frights the tavern-boor
Reeling drunken home.

Work on me your own caprice,
Give me any shape;
Only, Slumber, from myself
Let myself escape!

SEEMING DEFEAT

The woodland silence, one time stirred
By the soft pathos of some passing bird,
Is not the same it was before.
The spot where once, unseen, a flower

Has held its fragile chalice to the shower,
Is different for evermore.
Unheard, unseen
A spell has been!

O thou that breathest year by year
Music that falls unheeded on the ear,
Take heart, fate has not baffled thee!
Thou that with tints of earth and skies
Fillest thy canvas for unseeing eyes,
Thou hast not labored futilely.
Unheard, unseen
A spell has been!

"LIKE CRUSOE, WALKING BY THE LONELY STRAND"

Like Crusoe, walking by the lonely strand
And seeing a human footprint on the sand,
Have I this day been startled, finding here,
Set in brown mould and delicately clear,
Spring's footprint — the first crocus of the year!
O sweet invasion! Farewell solitude!
Soon shall wild creatures of the field and wood
Flock from all sides with much ado and stir,
And make of me most willing prisoner!

KNOWLEDGE

KNOWLEDGE — who hath it? Nay, not thou,
Pale student, pondering thy futile lore!
After a space it shall be thine, as now
'T is his whose funeral passes at thy door.
Couldst thou but see with those deep-sealèd eyes,
What lore were thine! The Dead alone are wise.

THE LETTER

EDWARD ROWLAND SILL, DIED FEBRUARY 27, 1887

I HELD his letter in my hand,
And even while I read
The lightning flashed across the land
The word that he was dead.

How strange it seemed! His living voice
Was speaking from the page
Those courteous phrases, tersely choice,
Light-hearted, witty, sage.

I wondered what it was that died!
The man himself was here,

His modesty, his scholar's pride,
His soul serene and clear.

These neither death nor time shall dim,
Still this sad thing must be —
Henceforth I may not speak to him,
Though he can speak to me!

"IN YOUTH, BESIDE THE LONELY SEA"

In youth, beside the lonely sea,
Voices and visions came to me.

Titania and her furtive broods
Were my familiars in the woods.

From every flower that broke in flame
Some half-articulate whisper came.

In every wind I felt the stir
Of some celestial messenger.

Later, amid the city's din
And toil and wealth and want and sin,

They followed me from street to street,
The dreams that made my boyhood sweet.

As in the silence-haunted glen,
So, mid the crowded ways of men,

Strange lights my errant fancy led,
Strange watchers watched beside my bed.

Ill fortune had no shafts for me
In this aerial company.

Now one by one the visions fly,
And one by one the voices die;

More distantly the accents ring,
More frequent the receding wing.

Full dark shall be the days in store,
When voice and vision come no more!

"GREAT CAPTAIN, GLORIOUS IN OUR WARS"

Great Captain, glorious in our wars —
No meed of praise we hold from him;
About his brow we wreathe the stars
The coming ages shall not dim.

The cloud-sent man! Was it not he
That from the hand of adverse fate
Snatched the white flower of victory?
He spoke no word, but saved the State.

Yet History, as she brooding bends
Above the tablet on her knee,
The impartial stylus half suspends,
And fain would blot the cold decree:

"The iron hand and sleepless care
That stayed disaster scarce availed
To serve him when he came to wear
The civic laurel: there he failed."

Who runs may read; but nothing mars
That nobler record unforgot.
Great Captain, glorious in our wars —
All else the heart remembers not.

THE WINTER ROBIN

Sursum corda

Now is that sad time of year
When no flower or leaf is here;
When in misty Southern ways

Oriole and jay have flown,
And of all sweet birds, alone
The robin stays.

So give thanks at Christmas-tide;
Hopes of springtime yet abide!
See, in spite of darksome days,
Wind and rain and bitter chill,
Snow, and sleet-hung branches, still
The robin stays!

A REFRAIN

High in a tower she sings,
I, passing by beneath,
Pause and listen, and catch
These words of passionate breath —
"*Asphodel, flower of Life; amaranth, flower of Death!*"

Sweet voice, sweet unto tears!
What is this that she saith?
Poignant, mystical — hark!
Again with passionate breath —
"*Asphodel, flower of Life; amaranth, flower of Death!*"

THE VOICE OF THE SEA

In the hush of the autumn night
I hear the voice of the sea,
In the hush of the autumn night
It seems to say to me —
Mine are the winds above,
Mine are the caves below,
Mine are the dead of yesterday
And the dead of long ago!

And I think of the fleet that sailed
From the lovely Gloucester shore,
I think of the fleet that sailed
And came back nevermore;
My eyes are filled with tears,
And my heart is numb with woe —
It seems as if 't were yesterday,
And it all was long ago!

ART

"Let art be all in all," one time I said,
And straightway stirred the hypercritic gall.
I said not, "Let technique be all in all,"
But art — a wider meaning. Worthless, dead —

The shell without its pearl, the corpse of things —
Mere words are, till the spirit lend them wings.
The poet who wakes no soul within his lute
Falls short of art: 't were better he were mute.

The workmanship wherewith the gold is wrought
Adds yet a richness to the richest gold;
Who lacks the art to shape his thought, I hold,
Were little poorer if he lacked the thought.
The statue's slumber were unbroken still
In the dull marble, had the hand no skill.
Disparage not the magic touch that gives
The formless thought the grace whereby it lives!

IMOGEN

LEONATUS POSTHUMUS *speaks:*

Sorrow, make a verse for me
  That shall breathe all human grieving;
Let it be love's exequy,
  And the knell of all believing!
  Let it such sweet pathos have
  As a violet on a grave,
    Or a dove's moan when his mate
    Leaves the new nest desolate.
  Sorrow, Sorrow, by this token,
Braid a wreath for Beauty's head. . . .

Valley-lilies, one or two,
Should be woven with the rue.
Sorrow, Sorrow, all is spoken —
She is dead!

A BRIDAL MEASURE

FOR S. F.

GIFTS they sent her manifold,
Diamonds and pearls and gold.
One there was among the throng
Had not Midas' touch at need:
He against a sylvan reed
Set his lips and breathed a song.

Bid bright Flora, as she comes,
Snatch a spray of orange blooms
For a maiden's hair.

Let the Hours their aprons fill
With mignonette and daffodil,
And all that 's fair.

For her bosom fetch the rose
That is rarest —
Not that either these or those
Could by any fortune be

Cradle Song

Ornaments to such as she;
They 'll but show, when she is dressed,
She is fairer than the fairest
And out-betters what is best!

CRADLE SONG

I

Ere the moon begins to rise
Or a star to shine,
All the bluebells close their eyes —
So close thine,
Thine, dear, thine!

II

Birds are sleeping in the nest
On the swaying bough,
Thus, against the mother-breast —
So sleep thou,
Sleep, sleep, thou!

SANTO DOMINGO

After long days of angry sea and sky,
The magic isle rose up from out the blue

Like a mirage, vague, dimly seen at first,
At first seen dimly through the mist, and then —
Groves of acacia; slender leaning stems
Of palm-trees weighted with their starry fronds;
Airs that, at dawn, had from their slumber risen
In bowers of spices; between shelving banks,
A river through whose limpid crystal gleamed,
Four fathoms down, the silvery, rippled sand;
Upon the bluff a square red tower, and roofs
Of cocoa-fibre lost among the boughs;
Hard by, a fort with crumbled parapet.
These took the fancy captive ere we reached
The longed-for shores; then swiftly in our thought
We left behind us the New World, and trod
The Old, and in a sudden vision saw
Columbus wandering from court to court,
A mendicant, with kingdoms in his hands.

AT A GRAVE

Valor, love, undoubting trust,
Patience, and fidelity
Lie beneath this carven stone.
If the end of these be dust,
And their doom oblivion,
Then is life a mockery.

RESURGAM

All silently, and soft as sleep,
The snow fell, flake on flake.

Slumber, spent Earth! and dream of flowers
Till springtime bid you wake.

Again the deadened bough shall bend
With blooms of sweetest breath.

O miracle of miracles,
This Life that follows Death!

A PETITION

To spring belongs the violet, and the blown
Spice of the roses let the summer own.
Grant me this favor, Muse — all else withhold —
That I may not write verse when I am old.

And yet I pray you, Muse, delay the time!
Be not too ready to deny me rhyme;
And when the hour strikes, as it must, dear Muse,
I beg you very gently break the news.

XXVIII SONNETS

I

INVITA MINERVA

Not of desire alone is music born,
Not till the Muse wills is our passion crowned ;
Unsought she comes ; if sought, but seldom found,
Repaying thus our longing with her scorn.
Hence is it poets often are forlorn,
In super-subtle chains of silence bound,
And mid the crowds that compass them around
Still dwell in isolation night and morn,
With knitted brow and cheek all passion-pale
Showing the baffled purpose of the mind.
Hence is it I, that find no prayers avail
To move my Lyric Mistress to be kind,
Have stolen away into this leafy dale
Drawn by the flutings of the silvery wind.

II

FREDERICKSBURG

The increasing moonlight drifts across my bed,
And on the churchyard by the road, I know
It falls as white and noiselessly as snow. . . .
'T was such a night two weary summers fled;
The stars, as now, were waning overhead.
Listen! Again the shrill-lipped bugles blow
Where the swift currents of the river flow
Past Fredericksburg; far off the heavens are red
With sudden conflagration; on yon height,
Linstock in hand, the gunners hold their breath;
A signal rocket pierces the dense night,
Flings its spent stars upon the town beneath:
Hark! — the artillery massing on the right,
Hark! — the black squadrons wheeling down to Death!

III

BY THE POTOMAC

The soft new grass is creeping o'er the graves
By the Potomac ; and the crisp ground-flower
Tilts its blue cup to catch the passing shower ;
The pine-cone ripens, and the long moss waves
Its tangled gonfalons above our braves.
Hark, what a burst of music from yon bower ! —
The Southern nightingale that hour by hour
In its melodious summer madness raves.
Ah, with what delicate touches of her hand,
With what sweet voice of bird and rivulet
And drowsy murmur of the rustling leaf
Would Nature soothe us, bidding us forget
The awful crime of this distracted land
And all our heavy heritage of grief.

IV

PURSUIT AND POSSESSION

When I behold what pleasure is pursuit,
What life, what glorious eagerness it is ;
Then mark how full possession falls from this,
How fairer seems the blossom than the fruit —
I am perplexed, and often stricken mute
Wondering which attained the higher bliss,
The wingèd insect, or the chrysalis
It thrust aside with unreluctant foot.
Spirit of verse, that still elud'st my art,
Thou uncaught rapture, thou swift-fleeting fire,
O let me follow thee with hungry heart
If beauty's full possession kill desire !
Still flit away in moonlight, rain, and dew,
Will-of-the-wisp, that I may still pursue !

V

MIRACLES

Sick of myself and all that keeps the light
Of the wide heavens away from me and mine,
I climb this ledge, and by this wind-swept pine
Lingering, watch the coming of the night:
'T is ever a new wonder to my sight.
Men look to God for some mysterious sign,
For other stars than such as nightly shine,
For some unwonted symbol of His might.
Wouldst see a miracle not less than those
The Master wrought of old in Galilee?
Come watch with me the azure turn to rose
In yonder West, the changing pageantry,
The fading alps and archipelagoes,
And spectral cities of the sunset-sea.

VI

"ENAMORED ARCHITECT OF AIRY RHYME"

ENAMORED architect of airy rhyme,
Build as thou wilt, heed not what each man says:
Good souls, but innocent of dreamers' ways,
Will come, and marvel why thou wastest time;
Others, beholding how thy turrets climb
'Twixt theirs and heaven, will hate thee all thy days;
But most beware of those who come to praise.
O Wondersmith, O worker in sublime
And heaven-sent dreams, let art be all in all;
Build as thou wilt, unspoiled by praise or blame,
Build as thou wilt, and as thy light is given;
Then, if at last the airy structure fall,
Dissolve, and vanish — take thyself no shame.
They fail, and they alone, who have not striven.

VII

EIDOLONS

THOSE forms we fancy shadows, those strange lights
That flash on lone morasses, the quick wind
That smites us by the roadside are the Night's
Innumerable children. Unconfined
By shroud or coffin, disembodied souls,
Still on probation, steal into the air
From ancient battlefields and churchyard knolls
At the day's ending. Pestilence and despair
Fly with the startled bats at set of sun;
And wheresoever murders have been done,
In crowded palaces or lonely woods,
Where'er a soul has sold itself and lost
Its high inheritance, there, hovering, broods
Some mute, invisible, accursèd ghost.

VIII

AT BAY RIDGE, LONG ISLAND

Pleasant it is to lie amid the grass
Under these shady locusts, half the day,
Watching the ships reflected on the Bay,
Topmast and shroud, as in a wizard's glass;
To note the swift and meagre swallow pass,
Brushing the dewdrops from the lilac spray;
Or else to sit and while the noon away
With some old love-tale; or to muse, alas!
On Dante in his exile, sorrow-worn;
On Milton, blind, with inward-seeing eyes
That made their own deep midnight and rich morn;
To think that now, beneath the Italian skies,
In such clear air as this, by Tiber's wave,
Daisies are trembling over Keats's grave.

IX

"EVEN THIS WILL PASS AWAY"

Touched with the delicate green of early May,
Or later, when the rose uplifts her face,
The world hangs glittering in starry space,
Fresh as a jewel found but yesterday.
And yet 't is very old; what tongue may say
How old it is? Race follows upon race,
Forgetting and forgotten; in their place
Sink tower and temple; nothing long may stay.
We build on tombs, and live our day, and die;
From out our dust new towers and temples start;
Our very name becomes a mystery.
What cities no man ever heard of lie
Under the glacier, in the mountain's heart,
In violet glooms beneath the moaning sea!

X

EGYPT

Fantastic sleep is busy with my eyes :
I seem in some waste solitude to stand
Once ruled of Cheops ; upon either hand
A dark illimitable desert lies,
Sultry and still — a zone of mysteries.
A wide-browed Sphinx, half buried in the sand,
With orbless sockets stares across the land,
The wofulest thing beneath these brooding skies
Save that loose heap of bleachèd bones, that lie
Where haply some poor Bedouin crawled to die.
Lo ! while I gaze, beyond the vast sand-sea
The nebulous clouds are downward slowly drawn,
And one bleared star, faint glimmering like a bee,
Is shut in the rosy outstretched hand of Dawn.

XI

AT STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

Thus spake his dust (so seemed it as I read
The words): *Good frend, for Jesvs' sake forbeare*
(Poor ghost!) *To digg the dvst encloasèd heare* —
Then came the malediction on the head
Of whoso dare disturb the sacred dead.
Outside the mavis whistled strong and clear,
And, touched with the sweet glamour of the year,
The winding Avon murmured in its bed.
But in the solemn Stratford church the air
Was chill and dank, and on the foot-worn tomb
The evening shadows deepened momently.
Then a great awe fell on me, standing there,
As if some speechless presence in the gloom
Was hovering, and fain would speak with me.

XII

WITH THREE FLOWERS

HEREWITH I send you three pressed withered
flowers:
This one was white, with golden star; this, blue
As Capri's cave; that, purple and shot through
With sunset-orange. Where the Duomo towers
In diamond air, and under pendent bowers
The Arno glides, this faded violet grew
On Landor's grave; from Landor's heart it drew
Its clouded azure in the long spring hours.
Within the shadow of the Pyramid
Of Caius Cestius was the daisy found,
White as the soul of Keats in Paradise.
The pansy — there were hundreds of them hid
In the thick grass that folded Shelley's mound,
Guarding his ashes with most lovely eyes.

XIII

THE LORELEI

YONDER we see it from the steamer's deck,
The haunted Mountain of the Lorelei —
The hanging crags sharp-cut against a sky
Clear as a sapphire without flaw or fleck.
'T was here the Siren lay in wait to wreck
The fisher-lad. At dusk, as he rowed by,
Perchance he heard her tender amorous cry,
And, seeing the wondrous whiteness of her neck,
Perchance would halt, and lean towards the shore;
Then she by that soft magic which she had
Would lure him, and in gossamers of her hair,
Gold upon gold, would wrap him o'er and o'er,
Wrap him, and sing to him, and drive him mad,
Then drag him down to no man knoweth where.

XIV

SLEEP

When to soft sleep we give ourselves away,
And in a dream as in a fairy bark
Drift on and on through the enchanted dark
To purple daybreak — little thought we pay
To that sweet bitter world we know by day.
We are clean quit of it, as is a lark
So high in heaven no human eye can mark
The thin swift pinion cleaving through the gray.
Till we awake ill fate can do no ill,
The resting heart shall not take up again
The heavy load that yet must make it bleed;
For this brief space the loud world's voice is still,
No faintest echo of it brings us pain.
How will it be when we shall sleep indeed?

XV

THORWALDSEN

Not in the fabled influence of some star,
Benign or evil, do our fortunes lie;
We are the arbiters of destiny,
Lords of the life we either make or mar.
We are our own impediment and bar
To noble endings. With distracted eye
We let the golden moment pass us by,
Time's foolish spendthrifts, searching wide and far
For what lies close at hand. To serve our turn
We ask fair wind and favorable tide.
From the dead Danish sculptor let us learn
To make Occasion, not to be denied:
Against the sheer precipitous mountain-side
Thorwaldsen carved his Lion at Lucerne.

XVI

AN ALPINE PICTURE

STAND here and look, and softly draw your breath
Lest the dread avalanche come crashing down!
How many leagues away is yonder town
Set flower-wise in the valley? Far beneath
Our feet lies summer; here a realm of death,
Where never flower has blossomed nor bird flown.
The ancient water-courses are all strown
With drifts of snow, fantastic wreath on wreath;
And peak on peak against the stainless blue
The Alps like towering campanili stand,
Wondrous, with pinnacles of frozen rain,
Silvery, crystal, like the prism in hue.
O tell me, love, if this be Switzerland —
Or is it but the frost-work on the pane?

XVII

TO L. T. IN FLORENCE

You by the Arno shape your marble dream,
Under the cypress and the olive trees,
While I, this side the wild wind-beaten seas,
Unrestful by the Charles's placid stream,
Long once again to catch the golden gleam
Of Brunelleschi's dome, and lounge at ease
In those pleached gardens and fair galleries.
And yet perchance you envy me, and deem
My star the happier, since it holds me here.
Even so one time, beneath the cypresses,
My heart turned longingly across the sea
To these familiar fields and woodlands dear,
And I had given all Titian's goddesses
For one poor cowslip or anemone.

XVIII

HENRY HOWARD BROWNELL

They never crowned him, never dreamed his worth,
And let him go unlaurelled to the grave :
Hereafter there are guerdons for the brave,
Roses for martyrs who wear thorns on earth,
Balms for bruised hearts that languish in the dearth
Of human love. So let the grasses wave
Above him nameless. Little did he crave
Men's praises ; modestly, with kindly mirth,
Not sad nor bitter, he accepted fate —
Drank deep of life, knew books, and hearts of men,
Cities and camps, and war's immortal woe,
Yet bore through all (such virtue in him sate
His spirit is not whiter now than then)
A simple, loyal nature, pure as snow.

XIX

THE RARITY OF GENIUS

WHILE yet my lip was breathing youth's first breath,
I all too young to know their deepest spell,
I saw Medea and Phædra in Rachel;
Later I saw the great Elizabeth.
Rachel, Ristori — we shall speak with death
Ere we meet souls like these. In one age dwell
Not many such: a century shall tell
Its hundred beads before it braid a wreath
For two so queenly foreheads. If it take
Æons to form a diamond, grain on grain,
Æons to crystallize its fire and dew,
By what slow processes must Nature make
Her Shakespeares and her Raffaels? Great the gain
If she spoil millions making one or two.

XX

BOOKS AND SEASONS

Because the sky is blue; because blithe May
Masks in the wren's note and the lilac's hue;
Because — in fine, because the sky is blue
I will read none but piteous tales to-day.
Keep happy laughter till the skies be gray,
And the sad season cypress wears, and rue;
Then, when the wind is moaning in the flue,
And ways are dark, bid Chaucer make us gay.
But now a little sadness! All too sweet
This springtide riot, this most poignant air,
This sensuous world of color and perfume.
So listen, love, while I the woes repeat
Of Hamlet and Ophelia, and that pair
Whose bridal bed was builded in a tomb.

XXI

OUTWARD BOUND

I LEAVE behind me the elm-shadowed square
And carven portals of the silent street,
And wander on with listless, vagrant feet
Through seaward-leading alleys, till the air
Smells of the sea, and straightway then the care
Slips from my heart, and life once more is sweet.
At the lane's ending lie the white-winged fleet.
O restless Fancy, whither wouldst thou fare?
Here are brave pinions that shall take thee far —
Gaunt hulks of Norway; ships of red Ceylon;
Slim-masted lovers of the blue Azores!
'T is but an instant hence to Zanzibar,
Or to the regions of the Midnight Sun;
Ionian isles are thine, and all the fairy shores!

XXII

ELLEN TERRY IN "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"

As there she lives and moves upon the scene,
So lived and moved this radiant womanhood
In Shakespeare's vision ; in such wise she stood
Smiling upon Bassanio ; such her mien
When pity dimmed her eyelids' golden sheen,
Hearing Antonio's story, and the blood
Paled on her cheek, and all her lightsome mood
Was gone. This shape in Shakespeare's thought has been !
Thus dreamt he of her in gray London town ;
Such were her eyes ; on such gold-colored hair
The grave young judge's velvet cap was set ;
So stood she lovely in her crimson gown.
Mine were a happy cast, could I but snare
Her beauty in a sonnet's fragile net.

XXIII

THE POETS

When this young Land has reached its wrinkled
prime,
And we are gone and all our songs are done,
And naught is left unchanged beneath the sun,
What other singers shall the womb of Time
Bring forth to reap the sunny slopes of rhyme?
For surely till the thread of life be spun
The world shall not lack poets, though but one
Make lonely music like a vesper chime
Above the heedless turmoil of the street.
What new strange voices shall be given to these,
What richer accents of melodious breath?
Yet shall they, baffled, lie at Nature's feet
Searching the volume of her mysteries,
And vainly question the fixed eyes of Death.

XXIV

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

FOREVER am I conscious, moving here,
That should I step a little space aside
I pass the boundary of some glorified
Invisible domain — it lies so near!
Yet nothing know we of that dim frontier
Which each must cross, whatever fate betide,
To reach the heavenly cities where abide
(Thus Sorrow whispers) those that were most dear,
Now all transfigured in celestial light!
Shall we indeed behold them, thine and mine,
Whose going hence made black the noonday sun? —
Strange is it that across the narrow night
They fling us not some token, or make sign
That all beyond is not Oblivion.

XXV

ANDROMEDA

The smooth-worn coin and threadbare classic
phrase
Of Grecian myths that did beguile my youth,
Beguile me not as in the olden days:
I think more grief and beauty dwell with truth.
Andromeda, in fetters by the sea,
Star-pale with anguish till young Perseus came,
Less moves me with her suffering than she,
The slim girl figure fettered to dark shame,
That nightly haunts the park, there, like a shade,
Trailing her wretchedness from street to street.
See where she passes — neither wife nor maid;
How all mere fiction crumbles at her feet!
Here is woe's self, and not the mask of woe:
A legend's shadow shall not move you so!

XXVI

REMINISCENCE

Though I am native to this frozen zone
That half the twelvemonth torpid lies, or dead;
Though the cold azure arching overhead
And the Atlantic's never-ending moan
Are mine by heritage, I must have known
Life otherwhere in epochs long since fled;
For in my veins some Orient blood is red,
And through my thought are lotus blossoms blown.
I do remember . . . it was just at dusk,
Near a walled garden at the river's turn
(A thousand summers seem but yesterday!),
A Nubian girl, more sweet than Khoorja musk,
Came to the water-tank to fill her urn,
And, with the urn, she bore my heart away!

XXVII

ON READING WILLIAM WATSON'S SONNETS ENTITLED "THE PURPLE EAST"

1896

Restless the Northern Bear amid his snows
Crouched by the Neva; menacing is France,
That sees the shadow of the Uhlan's lance
On her clipped borders; struggling in the throes
Of wanton war lies Spain, and deathward goes.
And thou, O England, how the time's mischance
Hath fettered thee, that with averted glance
Thou standest, marble to Armenia's woes!
If 't was thy haughty Daughter of the West
That stayed thy hand, a word had driven away
Her sudden ire, and brought her to thy breast!
Thy blood makes quick her pulses, and some day,
Not now, yet some day, at thy soft behest
She by thy side shall hold the world at bay.

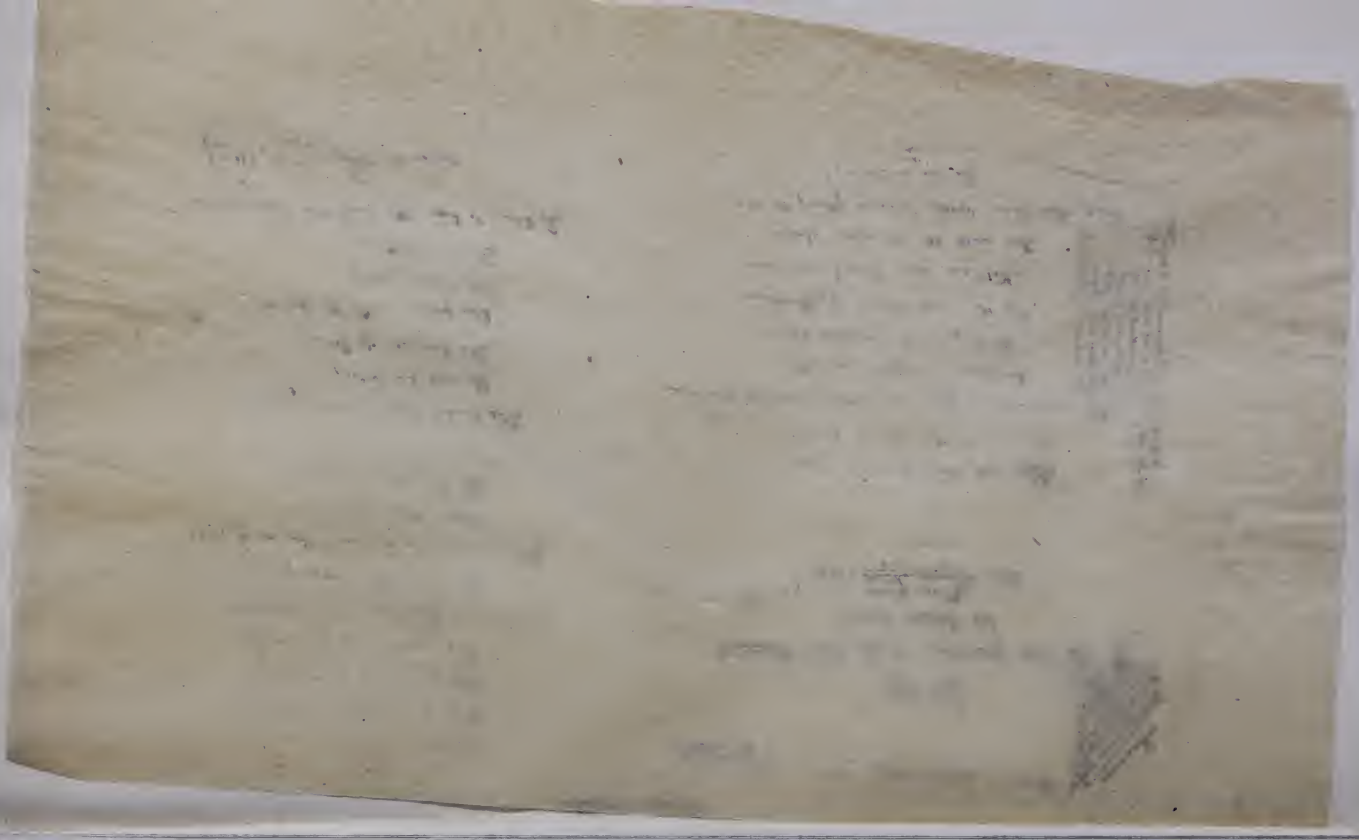
XXVIII

"I VEX ME NOT WITH BROODING ON THE YEARS"

I VEX me not with brooding on the years
That were ere I drew breath: why should I then
Distrust the darkness that may fall again
When life is done? Perchance in other spheres —
Dead planets — I once tasted mortal tears,
And walked as now amid a throng of men,
Pondering things that lay beyond my ken,
Questioning death, and solacing my fears.
Ofttimes indeed strange sense have I of this,
Vague memories that hold me with a spell,
Touches of unseen lips upon my brow,
Breathing some incommunicable bliss!
In years foregone, O Soul, was all not well?
Still lovelier life awaits thee. Fear not thou!

The Shaw Memorial, Boston Common

By Augustus St. Gaudens



I did not half express to you
the other day how deeply touching
your verses were to me — Believe me
Most cordially yours,
Augustus St Gaudens

~~To follow XXXIII Sonnets. Vol 7.~~ Original me for the poetry

An Ode

~~On~~ the Unveiling of the Shaw Memorial
On Boston Common
May ~~Twenty-Ninth~~ Thirty-First, 1897 Rom

I

Not with slow, funeral sound
Come we to this sacred ground,
Not with wailing fife and solemn muffled drums,
Bringing a cypress wreath
To lay, with beaded knee,
On the cold brows of Death —
Not so, dear God, we come,
But with the trumpets' blare
And shot-torn battle-banners flung to air,
As for a victory!

Not his to hesitate
And parley hold with Fate,
But proudly to fling down
His gauntlet at his foot
O soul of hope, valor and white truth,
Here, by this iron gate,
Thy serried ranks about thee as of yore,
Stand thou forevermore
In thy undying youth!

The tender heart, the eagle eye!
O, unto him belong
The homages of Song,
Our praises and the praise
Of coming days
To him belong —
To him, to him, the dead that shall not die.

Thomas Bailey Aldrich
April 29 1897

AN ODE

ON THE UNVEILING OF THE SHAW MEMORIAL ON BOSTON COMMON

May Thirty-First, 1897

I

Not with slow, funereal sound
Come we to this sacred ground;
Not with wailing fife and solemn muffled drum,
Bringing a cypress wreath
To lay, with bended knee,
On the cold brows of Death —
Not so, dear God, we come,
But with the trumpets' blare
And shot-torn battle-banners flung to air,
As for a victory!

Hark to the measured tread of martial feet,
The music and the murmurs of the street!
No bugle breathes this day
Disaster and retreat! —

Hark, how the iron lips
Of the great battle-ships
Salute the City from her azure Bay!

II

Time was — time was, ah, unforgotten years! —
We paid our hero tribute of our tears.
But now let go
All sounds and signs and formulas of woe:
'T is Life, not Death, we celebrate;
To Life, not Death, we dedicate
This storied bronze, whereon is wrought
The lithe immortal figure of our thought,
To show forever to men's eyes,
Our children's children's children's eyes,
How once he stood
In that heroic mood,
He and his dusky braves
So fain of glorious graves! —
One instant stood, and then
Drave through that cloud of purple steel and flame,
Which wrapt him, held him, gave him not again,
But in its trampled ashes left to Fame
An everlasting name!

III

That was indeed to live —
At one bold swoop to wrest
From darkling death the best
That death to life can give.
He fell as Roland fell
That day at Roncevaux,
With foot upon the ramparts of the foe!
A pæan, not a knell,
For heroes dying so!
No need for sorrow here,
No room for sigh or tear,
Save such rich tears as happy eyelids know.
See where he rides, our Knight!
Within his eyes the light
Of battle, and youth's gold about his brow;
Our Paladin, our Soldier of the Cross,
Not weighing gain with loss —
World-loser, that won all
Obeying duty's call!
Not his, at peril's frown,
A pulse of quicker beat;
Not his to hesitate
And parley hold with Fate,
But proudly to fling down
His gauntlet at her feet.

O soul of loyal valor and white truth,
Here, by this iron gate,
Thy serried ranks about thee as of yore,
Stand thou for evermore
In thy undying youth!

The tender heart, the eagle eye!
Oh, unto him belong
The homages of Song;
Our praises and the praise
Of coming days
To him belong —
To him, to him, the dead that shall not die!

JUDITH OF BETHULÎA

A TRAGEDY

CHARACTERS

HOLOFERNES, *Chief-captain of the Assyrians*

ACHIOR, *The Ammonite, lately fled from Holofernes and in love with Judith*

BAGOAS, *Captive and slave to Holofernes*

OZIAS, CHARMIS, CHABRIS } *Patriarchs of the beleaguered town*

JOACHIM, NATHAN } *Two Scholars*

ABNER, HADAD } *Captains of the Watch*

ELIKA, LAMECH } *Spearmen*

FIRST CAPTAIN, SECOND CAPTAIN, THIRD CAPTAIN, FOURTH CAPTAIN, FIFTH CAPTAIN, AN ARCHER } *Of Holofernes' Army*

JUDITH, *A rich widow of Bethulìa*

MARAH, *Handmaid and companion to Judith*

NAOMI, *A woman of the people*

Dancing-girls, musicians, Assyrian lords, and soldiers of both armies.

ACT I

SCENE I. A street in Bethulîa. Time: close upon daybreak. It is still very dark. Enter Ozias, Charmis, and Chabris with Abner and Hadad, captains of the guard, preceded by several night-watchmen carrying lighted lanterns slung on long staffs. The light-bearers, on halting, form in a half circle behind the speakers.

OZIAS

Here let us pause a moment and take breath.
(*To Abner*)
What is the hour?

ABNER

'T is close upon the dawn.

CHARMIS

At dawn it was we were to hear their prayer.

OZIAS

Their orders, rather. We no longer rule.

CHABRIS

Hunger and thirst and fever rule us now.
The people threaten to break down the gates
Unless within the limit of five days
We somehow get them bread and meat and drink,
Or come to terms with the Assyrians.

CHARMIS

That means surrender.

Judith of Bethulia

CHABRIS

And surrender means
Slaughter, since Holofernes seldom spares
Woman or child.

OZIAS

Scant mercy will he show
To us who for a month have blocked his march
Through the hill-passes.

CHARMIS

Can the town be held
Much longer?

OZIAS

No. Starvation faces us,
Draws each day nearer. We have still some grain,
And just outside the Eastern Gate a spring
The foe have not discovered.

(*Looking off*)

Who goes there?

ELIKA, *entering*

'T is I, Elikâ.

OZIAS

By the lantern's light
I read ill tidings in thy bloodless face.
What is it? Speak!

ELIKA

This night the enemy
Crept up unnoted to the very walls
And cut the water-course.

OZIAS, *aghast*

Where were our guards,
To let that happen?

ELIKA

Thrice their number came
And fell on them and slew them in the dark.
The bodies of our comrades choke the stream.

CHABRIS

Each moment brings some new calamity!

CHARMIS

Aye; it is whispered that the pest is here.
At set of sun two women and a child
Were taken with strange sickness on the street.

CHABRIS

Perchance they drank of some infected well.

CHARMIS

Enoch the leech, most wise in that disease,
Named it the plague.

OZIAS

Alas, that this should be!

(*To Hadad*)

What other stroke has fortune dealt to us
By stealth?

HADAD

Nought else. The foe have made no move
Save that now told to thee.

OZIAS

Unwatchful eyes,
Methinks, are those we trust to guard our sleep!

ABNER

Few are the eyes that have not watched this night.
Even the widow Judith hath stood guard,
Since dusk, upon the Tower.

CHARMIS

What brings her there?

ABNER

I know not. Achior the Ammonite,
Who has not quit the courtyard since she came,
Told me, in passing, that late yestere'en
He saw her hasten through the court and climb
The mouldy stairway, at whose foot he waits
To shield her from mischance when she descends.
Rude folk, and wanton, wander in the dark.

CHABRIS

Strange she should spend the night upon the
Tower!

OZIAS

Doubtless she sought the quiet of the place
There in the starlight to commune with God.
A holy woman, dead Manasseh's wife.
Her feet are swift to mercy. Through the siege
Her touch has soothed the dying, and her voice
In the dull ear of sorrow whispered hope.
An angel of sweet mercy has she been!

CHARMIS

Yet till we fell upon this evil time
She held herself aloof in her own house,
Leading a life of penances and prayers.
If she went forth, 't was with a widow's veil
That muffled up her beauty from the gaze.
Comely and fair is she to look upon!

OZIAS

Her beauty goes unhidden. She is seen
In every dingy by-way of the town
Where grief or pain has builded its abode.
No hovel is so loathsome but the earth
Before the door-sill bears her sandal-print.

ABNER

A saint among the poor! The common folk
Look on her as a kind of prophetess,
Like Deborah.

CHABRIS

I would that she might find
Another Jael! But such women now
Walk not the earth.

OZIAS

Who knows? In every age
Have mighty spirits dwelt unseen with man,
Biding the hour that needed them.

[*The stage lightens a little*

CHARMIS

Behold,
The dawn creeps on apace. 'T is well we stir.
What answer shall we give the desperate folk
Who bid us meet them in the council-hall
With some device to ease their misery?

CHABRIS

Such food as is, the fighting man must have,
Though wife and children starve — an old, old tale!

OZIAS

To yield the city is to seal our doom
At once. The people grant us five days' grace.
In this brief respite what may chance, God knows.

CHABRIS

Then at the end we open wide our gates
To Holofernes and his hungry swords!

OZIAS, *lifting up his hands*

Unless God help us.

(*Turns to Abner*)

We can find our way
Without the lanterns. Get thee now to bed,
Thou and thy men, who long have been a-foot.
The peace of God rest on thee and thy house!

The two officers salute the Patriarchs and go out, followed by the light-bearers extinguishing their lanterns.

Our path leads by the Tower; I fain would speak
With Judith, if she be not gone from there.
That woman's name, pronounced just now by chance,
Sent a quick thrill of lightness to my heart,
An exultation, wherefore I know not,
And something whispered me: "Go talk with her!"

CHARMIS

She must have gone by this.

OZIAS

'T is but a step,
And we shall know. Meanwhile the certainty
That she awaits us yonder in the court
Hath such possession of me I can see
The woman standing there, beneath the arch,
With parted lips as if to speak to us!

CHABRIS

Go first, Ozias ; we will follow thee.

Dark stage and change of scene

SCENE II. Early dawn. A spacious courtyard closed in at the rear by the city-wall. Antiquated architecture. Groups of squalid figures of men, women, and children dimly seen lying asleep here and there in the background. A dilapidated archway spans the left-hand upper entrance. A short flight of stone steps on the right leads to the door of a round tower forming part of the fortifications. Achior, in helmet and breastplate, is discovered standing near the foot of the steps in an attitude of expectancy. Presently he paces to and fro, glancing from time to time up at the tower with an anxious expression. A distant peal of trumpets is heard. The purple gradually lightens behind the battlements. As the scene progresses, citizens of wretched aspect cross the back of the stage, and at intervals a wounded soldier is borne by on a litter. The effect to be produced is that of a crowded town in a state of siege.

ACHIOR, *halting in front of the tower*

All this long night upon the battlements
Has Judith kept her vigil, and I here,
Low at her feet, where I would ever be —
Merari's daughter, dead Manasseh's wife,
Who, since the barley harvest when he died,
Has dwelt three years a widow in her house
And looked on no man : where Manasseh sleeps
In his strait sepulchre, there sleeps her heart.
She will not give me pleasure of her eyes
Nor any word of comfort. (*Pauses*) There she stands,

Fairer than morning in Arabia,
Her beauty blending with the light of dawn
On yonder tower. Now she turns, and now,
Like one that wanders in a dream, descends.
At last!

Achior withdraws a little. Judith appears in the doorway of the tower.

JUDITH, *descending the steps*

The Lord be with thee, Achior, all thy days!
May peace and grace walk ever at thy side.

ACHIOR

Daughter of heaven, would He but grant thy prayer,
I should not be the lonely man I am.
May I a word with thee?

JUDITH, *brushing past him*

Indeed not now.
Nay, stop me not, for I have haste to speak
Of weighty matters with the Patriarchs,
Who come this way — as if God sent them to me!

ACHIOR, *aside, impatiently*

So ends my waiting! Never have I chance
To be alone with her but some ill thing
Steps in between us! — Then some other hour,
Fair Judith?

JUDITH, *preoccupied*

Yes, some other hour than this.

Enter Ozias, Chabris, and Charmis.

CHARMIS, *aside to Chabris*

Lo! she is here. 'T is as Ozias said.
She seems like one foreknowing we would come.

Judith approaches the Patriarchs with her hands crossed upon her bosom, and makes low obeisance. Achior retires up the stage, and during the ensuing dialogue watches the speakers with deep interest.

OZIAS, *pausing and gazing intently at Judith*

I marvel much that in this stricken town
Is one face left not pinched with fear, nor wan
With grief's acquaintance. Such is Judith's face.

CHARMIS

That woman walketh in the light of God.

JUDITH

Would it were so! If so, I know it not;
Yet this I know, that where faith is, is light.
Oh, is it true, Ozias, thou hast mind
To yield the city to the infidels
After five days, unless the Lord shall stoop
From heaven to help us?

OZIAS, *with a despairing gesture*

It is even so.
The enemy have failed to batter down
Our gates of bronze, or decent entrance make
With beam or catapult in these tough walls,

Or with their lighted arrows fire the roofs.
Thus far our strength has baffled them ; but lo !
The wells run dry, the store of barley shrinks.
Our young men faint upon the battlements,
Our wives and children by the empty tanks
Lie down and perish.

JUDITH

If we doubt, we die.
But whoso trusts in God, as Isaac did,
Though suffering greatly even to the end,
Dwells in a citadel upon a rock :
Wave shall not reach it, nor fire topple down.

OZIAS

Our young men die upon the battlements,
And day by day beside the dusty wells
Our wives and children.

JUDITH

They shall go and drink
At living streams, through heavenly pastures walk
With Saints and Prophets in eternal life !
Is there no God ?

OZIAS

One only, one true God.
But now His face is turned aside from us,
He sees not Israel.

JUDITH

Is His mercy less
Than that of Holofernes? Shall we trust
In this fierce Bull of Asshur?

CHABRIS, *with an air of ending the discussion*

All is said!
The foe has hemmed us in on every side,
The plague is come, and famine walks the streets.
For five days more we place our trust in God.

JUDITH, *turning upon him sharply*

Ah, His time is not man's time, learnèd scribe!
And who are we — the dust beneath His feet —
To name the hour of our deliverance,
Saying to Him: *Thus shalt Thou do, and so!*
Ozias, thou to whom the heart of man
Is as a scroll illegible, dost thou
Pretend to read the mystery of God?

CHARMIS

The woman sayeth wisely. We are wrong
That in our anguish broke the staff of faith
Whereon we leaned till now. These aged eyes
Have lost their use if I see not in her
A God's white Angel bearing messages.

OZIAS

She seems like one inspired — mark her brow,
The radiance of it! Thus some Sibyl looks,

In trance, delivering her oracles.
When such lips speak, 't is to the souls of men.
Speak thou, we hear. What is it thou wouldst have?

JUDITH

I cannot answer thee, nor make it plain
In mine own thought. This night I had a dream
Not born of sleep, for both my eyes were wide,
My sense alive — a vision, if thou wilt,
Of which the scattered fragments in my mind
Are as the fragments of a crystal vase
That, slipping from a slave-girl's careless hand,
Falls on the marble. No most cunning skill
Shall join the pieces and make whole the vase.
So with my vision. I seem still to hear
Weird voices round me, inarticulate,
Words shaped and uttered by invisible lips.
At whiles there seems a palm prest close to mine
That fain would lead me somewhere. I know not
What all portends. Some great event is near.
Last night celestial spirits were on wing
Over the city. As I sat alone
Within the tower, alone yet not alone,
A strangest silence fell upon the land;
Like to a sea-mist stretching east and west
It spread, and close on this there came a sound
Of snow-soft plumage rustling in the dark,
And voices that such magic whisperings made
As the sea makes at twilight on a strip

Of sand and pebble. Suddenly I saw —
Look, look, Ozias! Charmis, Chabris, look!
See ye not, yonder, a white mailèd hand
That with its levelled finger points through air?

OZIAS

Nought but the vacant air do I behold.

JUDITH

There, look thou there! What blindness veils thine eyes?
See, it still lingers, like a silver mist!
It changes, fades, and then comes back again,
And now 't is ruby-red — as red as blood!

Judith shades her eyes with one palm as if the brightness dazzled. The Patriarchs, stricken with awe by Judith's words and manner, follow the direction of her gaze, but evidently see nothing. They look at one another wonderingly. Then Judith, after a pause:

'T is gone! Fear not; it was a sign to me,
To me alone. Ozias, didst thou note
The way it pointed? — to the Eastern Gate!
Send the guard orders not to stay me there.
Oh, question not! The omen I obey.
I must go hence. Before the shadow slants
Upon the courtyard thrice I shall return,
Else shall men's eyes not look upon me more.
What darkness lies between this hour and that
Tongue may not say. The thing I can, I will,

Leaning on God, remembering what befell
Jacob in Syria when he fed the flocks
Of Laban, and how Isaac in his day,
And Abraham, were chastened by the Lord.

OZIAS

This passes understanding. We would more
Of thy design, for thou art dear to us.

JUDITH

Wait thou in patience. Till I come, keep thou
The sanctuaries. Swear to keep them — swear!

The Patriarchs draw a little apart and appear to consult together for a moment.

OZIAS, *stepping from the group*

Although thy speech is fraught with mystery,
There lives conviction in it, and we swear
To hold the town, and if we hold it not,
Then shalt thou find us in the synagogue
Dead near the Sacred Ark; the spearmen dead
At the four gates; upon the parapets
The archers bleaching.

JUDITH

Be it so, my lords —
Yet be it not so! Shield me with thy prayers!

Judith bows down before the Patriarchs; they lift their hands in benediction above her head, and then slowly move away.

ACHIOR, *advancing swiftly down the stage*

Daughter of heaven! what mad thing is this?
Of thy dark commerce with these aged men
Something I caught, but nothing definite.
To some most perilous action on thy part
They seemingly consented. Tell me all!

JUDITH

Time and the place prevent me; and in truth,
Whereof we spoke concerns thee not to know.
Such scanty knowledge as thou hast of it
Keep locked within thy memory for a while.

ACHIOR

Thou hast some wild and dangerous intent
That chills my blood. Can I not counsel thee?
What evil dream at midnight in the tower
Has stolen thy reason? Whither wouldst thou go?

JUDITH, *hesitating a moment*

Didst see that finger pointing to yon camp?

ACHIOR

I saw it not, nor thou!

JUDITH

Thither I go.

ACHIOR

That thou shalt not!

JUDITH, *haughtily*

Thou sayest?

ACHIOR, *grasping her wrist*

Thou shalt not!
O Judith, listen! Rough I am in words
That would be gentle. What thy purpose is
Lies hidden from me. I see only this,
In yonder camp, among those barbarous hordes,
Swift death awaits thee, or some darker fate.

JUDITH

That must I venture. Other will than mine
Ordains the trial. O Achior, free my wrist!
Dear friend, brave soldier! Naught shall bar my way.

ACHIOR, *releasing her*

O Judith, let love bar it! Since the hour,
Now two years gone, when first I looked on thee,
No thought of mine by day or dream by night
Has been without thy image.

JUDITH, *recoiling*

Say it not!

ACHIOR

Can I behold thee go to shameful death,
And speak no word? My fear has made me bold.
Judith, I love thee. The dull sward that knows
Thy foot's light touch is hallowed ground to me.

I would not have the blossom from a bough
To fall upon thee rudely.

JUDITH, *fiercely, and then with sudden gentleness*

Peace, I say!—
Dear soul, my heart lies buried in a grave.
I have no love to give thee. Elsewhere seek
Some Jewish maiden worthy of thy worth.
I am thine elder both in time and grief.
No more of this. In kindness, pain me not.

ACHIOR

Then is my life a maimed and worthless thing.
Yet this is left me. If thou still art bent
On thy mysterious errand to yon camp,
I 'll go with thee. In other days I served
Prince Holofernes, from whose wrath I fled
To dwell, a wanderer, in alien tents,
And since have set my breast against his spears.
I know him well. 'T would fit his darksome mind
To lay a hand on me. Together, then!

JUDITH

The Patriarchs shall forbid it! *I* forbid!
Our path divides here, and so fare-thee-well!
Too long have I been spendthrift of my time.
I must prepare me for the journey hence.

(*Abstractedly*)

I shall go richly decked, pearls in my hair

And diamonds on my bosom. My handmaid
Shall even drape me in the rustling silk
That in a chest of camphor-wood has lain
Unworn since I was wed — the proud silk robe,
Heavy with vine-work, silvery flower and star,
And looped at either shoulder with a gem
To ransom princes.

(*Suddenly conscious of Achior*)

What, still art thou here?
Thou hast thy answer. Trouble me no more!

ACHIOR

Thou art gone mad! The grievous sights and sounds
Of this beleaguered town have turned thy brain
And bred in it some desperate resolve.
Whatever chances, I must follow thee.
I 'll to the Patriarchs and get their leave —
With or without it, thine shall be my doom.

JUDITH

Thou hast no part in it. God calls His own,
And I am His and Israel's! I go
To free my people, and, if needs must be,
Gladly to pay the forfeit with my life.
There lie the pith and sum of my intent.
Stand back and give me passage, Achior!

Judith brushes him aside and makes a swift exit through the archway at the rear of the stage. Daybreak.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE I. The Eastern Gate. A stretch of the ancient city-wall. In the centre of the masonry is a wide gateway before which stand several soldiers. Two spearmen, Lamech and Elika, with levelled lances are keeping back, right and left, a surging mob of men, women, and children. Here and there is a woman carrying an inverted water-jar. Nathan and two or three other respectably dressed citizens are seen in the throng. Murmurs and gesticulations. Voices in the crowd cry: "Drink! give us drink!" The rabble momently increases. Time: forenoon.

LAMECH

Fall back, good folk! Last night the enemy
Poisoned the spring outside the city wall.
It is forbidden to draw water now.
No soul may pass here. Back, poor creatures, back!

VOICES

Drink! give us drink! we die of thirst — of thirst!

AN OLD MAN, *leaning on a staff*

Oh, are we not Thy children who of old,
Trod the Chaldean idols in the dust,
And built our altars only unto Thee?

VOICES

Bread! we are starving. Bread, or we must die!

A WOMAN

Just one poor wheaten loaf since yesterday —
For three of us! In mercy's name, a crust!
My little Ruth is dying!

LAMECH

Woman, peace!
'T is better so. I saw our Rachel die,
Our last born ewe lamb, and I shed no tear,
Knowing that hunger could not grieve her more.
So weep not thou.

ELIKA

My bosom aches for thee,
Beneath this breastplate.

VOICES

Water! water! bread!

NATHAN, *apart*

With fire and sword and famine, evil days
Have fallen upon us! — What is happening?

A perceptible new commotion in the crowd, then a sudden hush as Joachim enters in haste.

JOACHIM, *excitedly*

Two minutes since, as I was pondering
The famished folk that haunt the market-place,
Where one had fallen, smitten with the pest,
A woman swept me by — if 't was indeed

A woman, not an angel — in a blaze
Of gems and snowy raiment. Such a shape
Comes to men's dreams. Along the crowded streets
Thin, pleading hands reached out to touch her hem,
Rude archers doffed their head-gear as she passed,
And all the people stood amazed, as though
'T was some seraphic creature sent of God
To save us in our misery. Behold,
The shining apparition moves this way!

The crowd silently huddle together on one side of the stage and gaze wonderingly in the direction indicated by Joachim.

VOICES

A miracle! a miracle!

NATHAN, *shading his eyes and looking off*

Not so!
And yet a wonder! — dead Manasseh's wife,
Not in her mournful widow's-weeds, but decked
As for a banquet! I remember her
In those same bridal garments as she stood
Before the High Priest in the synagogue
One happier day than this! What may it mean?
Surely she would not mock us with her state.

JOACHIM

I knew her not in that unwonted guise.

Enter Judith partly veiled, a crowd following. She is richly dressed, with jewels in her hair and at the throat. A mantle falling from one shoulder exposes the splendor of her attire. Close behind follows Marah, the handmaid, carrying an osier basket. A woman holds up a child to Judith, who bends down and caresses it.

JUDITH

My heart bleeds for thee, thou most sorrowful!
From brow and bosom I would tear these jewels
Couldst thou but eat them, or were food to buy.
I give thee silver, though 't is mockery;
A dozen grains of barley were more worth.

Judith hurriedly hands the woman several pieces of silver from a pouch. As she falls back into the crowd, a woman clutches Judith by the skirt.

Unloose thy fingers and delay me not!
I go to Holofernes, and perchance
By prayer and supplication I shall win
His princely mercy for this stricken town
And all the wretched folk within its walls.
Nay, loose thy hold, each moment hath its price!

Judith wrests herself from the woman's grasp, arranges the veil over her face, and approaches the two spearmen at the gate, who stop her with their crossed lances held breast-high.

LAMECH

None may pass forth without the captain's seal.

JUDITH, *drawing a parchment from her girdle*

That have I here. Already thou hast word
To speed me and my handmaid. I am she
The parchment tells of.

(*Looking closely at one of the spearmen while the other examines the scroll*)

Thou — I knew thee once,
Elika, son of Jorim, aforetime
My husband's herdsman — a brave soldier now.
Thy gentle sister and thy mother, friend,
How fares it with them?

ELIKA

She that clutched thy gown,
That was my mother. Reason fled from her
When Leah died.

JUDITH, *wringing her hands*

And that was Naomi,
And I repulsed her! Whither has she gone?

Judith turns passionately to the crowd, which opens and shows Naomi standing in the background with a blank expression on her countenance. Judith takes her tenderly by the hand and leads her forward.

Dost thou not know me? It was in thine arms
I lay and slept the hour that I was born.
Dear nurse, look on me. It is even I,
"Judith the wilful" — thou didst call me so.

NAOMI

Ay, it is Judith, a grown maiden now,
The pearl of maidens. 'T is thy wedding day,
And my sweet Leah has gone, I know not where —
Somewhere hard by — to gather snow-white flowers
To deck thee.

JUDITH

Oh, she stabs me to the heart
With her unreason!

ELIKA

Ever thus she talks,
Unmindful, wandering from place to place
In search of Leah. She seems to know thee now,
But presently her mind will be a blur.
See how she stares at thee!

NAOMI, *gazing vaguely at Judith*

And who art thou
To stay me in the street here? Dost thou bring
Tidings of Leah? Has she told thee all —
How we two lay at midnight parched with thirst,
And would not touch the water in the jar
(Scarcely a gill there was!), but each to each
Smiled, and said: "Drink thou!" Then I fell asleep,
And just at dawn, I being in a drowse,
She brought the jar and set it to my lip,
And I, unwitting, drained the precious drops
That might have saved her! When the morning came

She spoke no more, but lay there white and cold.
Was that the tale she told thee? Oh, 't was true!

JUDITH

If this be not a dream, her heart is broken!

NAOMI

Listen — behind the wainscot I have hid
A cup of sweet rain-water. I would die
A thousand deaths ere I would taste of it!
Let her come back to me, my best beloved!

JUDITH

This is too piteous! Some one take her hence.
(*Discovering Nathan in the crowd*)
Ah — thou, good Nathan; lead her to my house
And bid my people there to care for her
Till I — God willing — shall come back again.
Go with him, Naomi. — Such balm as heals
A wounded spirit send Thou to this one!

Judith places the hand of Naomi in that of Nathan, who leads her away.

LAMECH, *returning the scroll to Judith*

Manasseh's widow — may God guard thee — pass!

Attendant soldiers throw open the heavy gates. Lamech and Elika range themselves on either side and salute Judith impressively as she passes out.

JUDITH, *over her shoulder*

Quick, Marah, follow me!

Dark stage and change of scene

SCENE II. The Camp of Asshur. An open space surrounded by cedar and olive trees. In the distant background are tents arranged in a semicircle under arching boughs. Part way down the stage on the left is a marquee with green hangings covering the entrance. Under a fringed canopy in the middle foreground Holofernes is discovered lying upon a leopard skin, his head propped up on one hand. On each side of him are groups of Assyrian lords and captains. Spearmen and men-of-all-arms observed lounging at the wings. Bagoas stands a little distance from his master. The soldiers in miscellaneous costumes, Holofernes' army being composed of conscripts from a dozen different conquered nations. Time: noon.

HOLOFERNES

O lords and captains, we are put to shame.
How does it happen that a little town,
Stuck like a hornet's nest against a rock,
Checks and defies such mighty hosts as ours?
Till now we swept in triumph through the land.
As the pent whirlwind, breaking from its leash,
Seizes upon the yellow desert sands
And hurls them in dark masses right and left,
So have we scattered the great armies sent
To stop our progress. All the nations saw
Our might, and cowered. One by one they came
And swore allegiance, grovelling at our feet —
The sons of Esau and the Moabites,
The tribes that dwelt beside the salt-sea dunes,
And those that builded on the mountain-tops.
All, save these dogs of Hebrews, bent the knee.

(*An archer enters suddenly*)

What would that man? His coming vexes me.

THE ARCHER, *kneeling*

O lord and prince, that should know all, know this:
An hour ago a watchman on the height
That overlooks the city saw two shapes
From out the eastern gateway issue forth —
In quest of water, it was thought at first.
But no, they paused not at the ruined well
Piled up three-deep with those we slew last night.
Straight on they pressed, and plunged into the wood
That hides a hundred footpaths through the hills,
And there, as if by magic, disappeared.
Swift runners were despatched to seek these two,
But all in vain.

HOLOFERNES

Begone! It matters not.
I would two thousand issued from that gate
And gave us chance to feed them with our swords.
Fool of the gods, to fetch me such a tale!

[*The archer salaams and goes out crestfallen*

Let no one else break in on our discourse.
Give me your wisdom, ye who lead my hosts.
For a moon's length have we been held at bay
By a mere handful in a crumbling town
That blocks our passage through the narrow pass.
This is the key unlocks a world beyond.
Jerusalem should have fallen long ago
And all the riches of Judea been ours.

Some spell more potent than the Hebrew spears
Must work behind them. Speak; what shall be done?

(*Waves his hand toward one of the lords*)

Say on, brave Captain of the Elymeans.
What voice is thine?

1ST CAPTAIN

My voice is for assault.
Better lie dead, each man upon his shield,
Than waste here with no grass to feed the mares
And scant meat left. Rust gathers on our swords.

HOLOFERNES, *turning to another chief*

And thou?

2D CAPTAIN

My lord, a soberer counsel mine.
Wide is the moat and many are the spears,
And stout the gates. Have we not flung our men
Against the well-set edges of their swords?
Note how the ravens wheel in hungry files
Above the trenches; watch them as they rise
Red-beaked and surfeited. Has it availed?
The city still defies us; but within
There 's that shall gnaw its heart out, if we wait;
For white-cheeked famine and red-spotted pest
Are our allies.

3D CAPTAIN

A judgment! Let us wait.

4TH CAPTAIN, *turning fiercely on the last two speakers*

Ye should have tarried on the river's bank
At home, and decked your hair with butterflies
Like the King's harlots. Little use are ye!

5TH CAPTAIN

Nay, valiant Dara, they did well to come;
They have their uses. When our meat is gone
We 'll even feed upon the tender flesh
Of these tame girls, who, though they dress in steel,
Like more the tinkle of a dulcimer
Than the sharp whisper of an arrowhead.

Tumult and angry mutterings among the captains; several of them lay hand on their sword-hilts, and threaten one another. The bowmen and spearmen at the wings make ready with their weapons. Holofernes springs to his feet and glares menacingly at the chiefs.

HOLOFERNES

Hold! — Keep thy falchions for the enemy.
Who draws a blade shall sheathe it in his breast! —
The conclave ends. Later I speak my will.

Judith, followed by Marah, enters from the rear of the stage, halts in terror halfway down, and then swiftly advances, looking about her to ascertain whom she shall address. Murmurs of surprise and admiration are heard on every side. Marah remains in the background, holding the osier basket in her arms.

HOLOFERNES, *starting*

Who breaks upon our councils? Silence, all!
Whence comest thou — thy mission and thy name?

JUDITH

Judith of Bethulîa I am called.

HOLOFERNES, *partly aside*

Methought the phantom of some murdered queen
Had risen from the ground beneath my feet! —
If these Samarian women are thus shaped,
O my brave captains, let not one be slain!
What seekest thou within the hostile tents
Of Asshur?

JUDITH

Holofernes.

HOLOFERNES

This is he.

JUDITH, *throwing herself at his feet*

Most mighty prince and master, if indeed
Thou art that Holofernes whom I seek,
And dread, in truth, to find, see at thy feet
A hapless woman who in fear has flown
From a doomed people.

HOLOFERNES

If thy words are true,
Thou shalt have shelter of our tents, and food,

And meet observance, though our enemy.
Touching thy people, they with tears of blood,
And ashes on their heads, shall rue the hour
They paid not tribute to our sovereign lord,
The King at Nineveh. But thou shalt live.

JUDITH, *rising*

O gracious prince, I do beseech thee now
Let those that listen stand awhile aloof,
For I have that for thine especial ear
Of import to thee.

At a gesture from Holofernes the captains and men-at-arms retire, making different exits. Bagoas lingers. Judith with a quick look calls the attention of Holofernes to the circumstance. He motions to Bagoas to withdraw.

My lord, if yet thou holdest in thy thought
The words which Achior the Ammonite
Once spoke to thee concerning Israel,
Oh, treasure them, for in them was no guile.
True is it, master, that our people kneel
To an unseen but not an unknown God,
And while we worship Him we cannot fall,
Our tabernacles shall be unprofaned,
Our spears invincible; but if we sin,
If we transgress the law by which we live,
Our sanctuaries shall be desecrate,
Our tribes thrust forth into the wilderness,
Scourged and accursed. Therefore, O my lord,

Seeing my nation wander from the faith
Taught of the Prophets, I have fled dismayed.

HOLOFERNES, *partly to himself*

In this wise, I remember, Achior spoke,
And warned me not to meddle with the Jews.
I banished him, and straight he refuge sought
Among the Israelites, who gave him place
And honor in their councils. Now his sword
Is turned against us. Hebrew, weigh thy words!

JUDITH

Heed, Holofernes, what I speak this day,
And if the thing I tell thee prove not so,
Let not thy falchion tarry in its sheath,
But seek my heart. Why should thy handmaid live,
Having deceived thee, flower and crown of men!

HOLOFERNES, *aside*

This woman's voice falls sweeter on my ear
Than the soft laughter of the Assyrian girls
In the bazaars, or when in the cool night,
After the sultry heat of the long day,
They sit beside the fountain with their lutes.

JUDITH

Oh, listen, Holofernes, my sweet lord,
And thou shalt rule not only Bethulîa,

Rich with its hundred altars' crusted gold,
But Cadés-Barné and Jerusalem,
And all the vast hill-land to the blue sea.
I bring to thee the keys of Israel.

HOLOFERNES

Speak, for I needs must hearken to thy words.

JUDITH

Know then, O prince, it is our yearly use
To lay aside the first fruits of the grain,
And so much oil, so many skins of wine,
Which, being sanctified, are held intact
For the High Priests who serve before the Lord
In the great temple at Jerusalem.
This holy food — which even to touch is death —
The people would lay hands on, being starved;
And they have sent a runner to the Priests
(The Jew Abijah, who, at dead of night,
Sped like a javelin between thy guards),
Begging permit to eat the sacred corn.
'T will not be granted them, as time will prove,
Yet will they eat it. Then shalt thou behold
The archers tumbling headlong from the walls,
Their strength gone from them; thou shalt see the spears
Splitting like reeds within the spearmen's hands,
And the strong captains tottering like old men
Stricken with palsy. Then, O mighty prince,

Then with thy trumpets blaring doleful dooms,
And thy proud banners waving in the wind,
With squares of men and eager clouds of horse
Thou shalt sweep down on them, and strike them dead!

HOLOFERNES

The picture, sorceress, lives before my eyes!

JUDITH

But now, my lord, ere this shall come to pass
Five days must wane, for they touch not the food
Until the Jew Abijah shall return
With the Priests' message. Here beneath thy tents,
O Holofernes, would I dwell the while,
Asking but this, that I and my handmaid
Each night, at the sixth hour, may egress have
Into the valley, undisturbed to pray.
I would not be thy prisoner, but thy guest.

HOLOFERNES

Thou shalt be free to come and go, and none
Shall stay thee, nor molest thee, these five days.
And if, O rose of women, the event
Prove not a dwarf beside the prophecy,
Then has the sun not looked upon thy like.
Thy name shall be as honey on men's lips;
Thou shalt have chests of costly sandal-wood,
And robes in texture like the ring-dove's neck,
And milk-white mares, and chariots, and slaves;

And thou shalt dwell with me in Nineveh,
In Nineveh, the City of the Gods!

JUDITH, *making a half imperceptible clutch at her bosom*

Oh, who am I that should gainsay my lord?

HOLOFERNES

Bagoas shall wait on thee; command the slave.
Bid him fetch fruit and meat for thy repast.

JUDITH

It is not lawful we should eat of them.
My maid has brought a pouch of parchèd corn,
And bread and figs and wine of our own land,
Which shall not fail us.

HOLOFERNES

Even as thou wilt,
O fair Samarian! My slave shall come
To do thy bidding.

[*Holofernes goes out*

JUDITH

O Marah, is it night, and do I dream?
Is this the dread Assyrian rumor paints,
He who upon the plains of Ragau smote
The hosts of King Arphaxad, and despoiled
Sidon and Tyrus, and left none unslain?
Gentle he seems we thought so terrible,
Whose name we stilled unruly children with

At bedtime — *See! the Bull of Asshur comes!*
And all the little ones would straight to bed.

MARAH, *slowly*

Mistress, he looks not what we pictured him.

JUDITH

Is he not statured as should be a king?
Beside our tallest captain this grave prince
Towers like the palm above the olive tree.
A gentle prince, with gracious words and ways.
How sayest thou?

MARAH

A gentle prince he is —
To look on. I misdoubt his ways and words.

JUDITH

And I, O Marah, I would trust him not!
Beneath his smoothness all is cruelty.
A tiger's talons thus are shod with down.

(*Enter Bagoas; Judith perceives him, and says quickly*)

Marah, he waits to show thee to the tent.

(*Aside*) The prince's slave — his shadow, so it seems.
I would not have the ill-will of this man.

Bagoas relieves Marah of the basket and enters the green pavilion with her. He immediately reappears, crossing the stage behind Judith. She observes him attentively.

Thy lord, Bagoas, is a powerful prince.

BAGOAS, *coming forward*

Men fear him greatly.

JUDITH

And thou fearest him?

BAGOAS

I serve him, lady, since I am his slave.

JUDITH

Now thou art mine, I buy thee of thyself
With coin of kindness — rarer 't is than gold.
Thy speech and manner seem beyond thy state.

BAGOAS

In my own land I was less humbly placed.
A merchant was I, but a scholar's son,
And had some strain of learning in my blood.
I travelled in far lands with merchandise,
Lord of rich caravans. Then came a war.
From Koordistán he brought me with his spoils,
This conqueror of cities, slayer of men.
I pine in my captivity, and dream
Of where the swift Nerbudda laves its banks
And one sad woman waits for me in vain.
The gold he throws me in his lavish moods
I hoard to pay my ransom.

JUDITH, *taking a ring from her finger*

Is it so?
Here 's that shall aid thee; add it to thy store.

BAGOAS

My prayers shall go with thee both day and night.

[*He presses the ring to his lips as he goes out*

JUDITH

At least he will not be an enemy.

(*Muses*)

'T was not so evil as I feared, and yet
My heart is cold with terror. What step next?
The end appalls me. A black precipice
Yawns at my feet whichever way I turn.
I am like one that a magician's wand
Hath laid a spell upon; I neither speak
Nor move but as some unseen power directs.
I seem to wander in a land of dream
And walk with spectres. As a skein of flax,
Dropt by a weaver working at his loom,
Lies in a tangle, and but snarls the more,
And slips the fingers searching for the clue,
So all my plan lies tangled in my brain.
How stands the matter? I have gained five days
In which to act, and in the interval
May come and go unchallenged by the guard.
Thus far God lights me. All the rest is dark.

Achior abruptly appears at the remote rear of the stage — same entrance as Judith. He halts irresolutely, glancing back over his shoulder, as if he were pursued. Judith turns and discovers him. She rushes to Achior and seizes him by the arm.

Fly from this place, O Achior, here is death!

ACHIOR

I would not were it possible. Unseen
I reached the inner lines, but there I fell
Upon two Tartar sentinels asleep;
I broke their slumber and they gave alarm.
I think they follow closely on my heels.

JUDITH

What brings thee to the tents of Asshur?

ACHIOR

Thou!
It was my hope to be thy sword and shield.

JUDITH

I was not in thy keeping, reckless man!
Thy rashness will be like to ruin me.

ACHIOR

Deny me when they question. I will swear
I never knew or saw thee till this hour.
Torture shall wring no other word from me.

JUDITH

Too late. This very hour I spoke of thee
To Holofernes.

ACHIOR

Say, then, I am one
Thy scorn hath withered, that my wits are gone,
And that I vex thee with my vain pursuit;
Then bid him end me.

JUDITH

Thou indeed art mad.
Less wise than daring, see how thou hast rushed
Headlong on failure!

Sounds of voices and clanking arms off the stage. Several Tartar soldiers rush in and secure Achior. Holofernes enters from the opposite side attended by Bagoas bearing flowers and palm leaves in his arms. Holofernes on seeing Achior starts back in surprise, and then advances with a cynical smile on his lips.

HOLOFERNES

Who thus honors us?
Unless my vision tricks me, it is he,
My valorous Captain of the Ammonites,
My poet-soldier, breaker of maids' hearts,
Harp-player — that shall play upon a rack!

JUDITH, *aside*

There spoke the Holofernes of my thought.

Holofernes remains silent a few seconds, glancing from Judith to Achior alternately, and finally lets his gaze rest upon Judith.

HOLOFERNES, *suspiciously*

Thou know'st this man?

JUDITH, *indifferently*

By sight, but more by name.
A stranger's face is his among the Jews.
I 've seen him on the streets in Bethulîa.
How came he here?

HOLOFERNES

Perhaps he followed thee.

JUDITH, *playing with her necklace*

I want him not.

HOLOFERNES

Nor I! This Ammonite
Has little earthly value, it appears —
A kind of carrion that finds no bids
Among the buyers in the market-place.
How then dispose of him? Thou dost not beg
His life of me?

JUDITH

Why should I, lord of all?
I would not beg of thee my own poor life
Were that at issue.

HOLOFERNES

'T were an empty plea
Hadst thou the cause to make it!

JUDITH, *to herself*

We are lost!

HOLOFERNES

Though thou wert folded in my very heart,
I 'd tear thee out, didst thou play false with me!
I 'll think on it. Meanwhile what shall be done?

JUDITH

Do what thou wilt, O sovereign lord.

HOLOFERNES

Well said!
Thou hast a cunning fashion in thy speech.

(*To the guard*)

Take him away, and as thou lovest light,
See he escape not.

(*To Achior with a mock air of deference*)

In some leisure hour
I 'll crave thy company. — Out of my sight!

(*To Judith tenderly*)

Lady, I bring thee flowers!

The soldiers prepare to drag Achior off, one of them unclasping a belt with which to bind him. Judith stands rigid and cold in the centre of the stage. As Holofernes offers the flowers to her, he looks over his shoulder suspiciously at Achior. Marah, who has partly drawn back the curtain of the pavilion, peers out timidly between the draperies.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE I. A secluded wood near the Assyrian camp. Early twilight. A slowly increasing red glow overspreads the stage. Judith is seated on the trunk of a fallen tree arranging wild flowers in her lap. She has discarded the ornaments worn in Act II, a white scarf replacing the pearl necklace; her costume otherwise the same. Marah in the background holding a small wicker pannier containing lilies, ferns, etc. Holofernes stands a pace or two from Judith regarding her.

HOLOFERNES

Fair women have I known, but never one
Like unto thee. The hour I see thee not
Creeps like a tortoise; but when thou art near,
No swiftest sparrow hath such wings as time.

JUDITH

Of late, my lord, my ear has grown unused
To terms like thine. It has been wont to hear
Accents of grief and pain. Thy phrases seem
As phrases spoken in some half-known tongue.

HOLOFERNES

Then let thy wit translate. In these three days
Have I been lessoned by thy dignity,
Thy wisdom and thy loveliness. The camp
And all the lordly uses of my state
Have lost their savor and significance.

That thou shouldst sit and hold a little flower
Between thy fingers, toying with it thus
Idly and dropping it, doth move me more
Than some affair of gravest urgency.

(*Sits down beside her*)

At dawn I say: "I shall again behold
This daughter of Judea, shall hear her voice,
And catch, mayhap, a softness in her eyes."
Translate thou that, O wise Samarian!

JUDITH

Some lady of the court at Nineveh
Perchance might find a meaning.

HOLOFERNES

She were else
No woman! Tell me somewhat of thyself.
Thou art a widow?

JUDITH

I have told thee that —
And daughter to a man could ransom me.

HOLOFERNES

Not though he were the richest in Judea!
How long wert thou a wife?

JUDITH

One year, my lord.

HOLOFERNES

And widow?

JUDITH

Three.

HOLOFERNES

He loved thee well?

JUDITH

O prince,
I may not speak of this!

HOLOFERNES

In faith, nor I.
There 's matter nearer; what is past is dead. —
Art never merry? I would hear thy laugh.
Sad thou art not, and yet methinks thy smiles
Are rarer than a miser's charities.
There is a carven image of a sphinx,
A woman and a lion both in one,
That crouching stares across the empty air
With face mysterious, neither sad nor glad.
Thou mind'st me of it, though thy face can change.
Three noons ago thy cheek went white as death
At sight of me. Thou dost not fear me now?

JUDITH

Not now as then, yet I have fear, O prince.

HOLOFERNES

Thou shalt unlearn it. Busy tongues of men
Have misused me in their dull report,

And made my name a terror through the land.
A soldier's falchion sleeps not in the sheath;
But when these wars are done with I shall hang
My helmet in a garden for the birds
To build a nest in.

JUDITH

Thou art gentler far
Than I had thought thee.

HOLOFERNES

My grim captains here
Would smile behind their beards, could they but know
What soft ambition seizes me at times
Even in the heat and tumult of debate —
A longing to be other than I am,
To turn my back on all this pomp of war
And dwell unknown, in some untroubled spot,
With wife and children, dreaming life away
Beneath the palms and my Assyrian sky.

JUDITH

This earth, my lord, holds not within its store
Of jewels, crowns, and principalities
A thing more precious than thou dreamest of —
Peace and content, and love, the flower of life.

HOLOFERNES

An idle dream that weakens valor's arm.
Meanwhile that nest of vipers is uncrushed!

(*Starts to his feet*)

Were I much longer to be held at bay
In these accursed hills, I should become
The savage thing men paint me. But the end
Approaches near — my plans are subtly laid.
Two days from this, unless the very gods
Take arms against us, Bethulîa falls.

[*He walks up the stage*

JUDITH, *aside*

But two days left — God help me! Life or death
Lies in the interval!

HOLOFERNES, *turning sharply*

What sayest thou?

JUDITH, *recovering herself*

That in two days, my lord, it will be shown
Whether or no I am true prophetess.

HOLOFERNES

I shall have kept my covenant, and now
I swear no harm shall touch the oracle,
Though she prove —

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER, *kneeling*

Prince and master, I am sent.
The council waits thy presence, gracious lord.

HOLOFERNES, *impatiently*

Say that I come. I had forgotten them!

'T was I myself convoked the conference.
These wrangling captains give me little rest.
Straightway I come.

[*Exit Messenger*

I go on leaden feet.
I leave thee as a reveller leaves his cup,
The wine unfinished. So, now, fare thee well!

[*Holofernes goes out*

JUDITH

Amen to that, say I, who fare so ill,
With all this darkness closing in on me.

MARAH, *coming forward*

I would, dear mistress, we might not return
To yonder camp. Rude folk for such as thou,
Those long-haired men that from the Tigris come,
And they that stain their teeth with betel-nut —
Fire-worshippers and bowers-down to stone.
Even the good Bagoas in his pack
Hath a flint image that he mutters to!

JUDITH

And I, in truth, I too would not go back;
But that must be, my mission is not done.
Not long our exile now. Hast left behind
Some love-lorn dark-eyed youth in Bethulîa?
Here in the summer quiet of this wood
How far we seem from that distracted town
Wrapped in the vapor of its own sick breath!
Conscience reproaches me that I have found

Some transient moments of forgetfulness
Plucking these wild flowers. 'T was a truce with fate.
Great peril threatens us. Would thou wert safe!
Cruel was I to drag thee in this coil!

MARAH

What danger threatens that I would not share
With thee, sweet mistress?

JUDITH

Ah, thou know'st not all.
To-night, when slumber has sealed every ear,
I 'll tell thee what dark embassy is mine
And what fell doom upon disaster waits.
Then, if thou waver, still is time to fly
And save thee.

(*Rises to her feet, and listens*)

Hark! some foot of man or beast
Has crushed a dry twig in the thicket there!

Bagoas enters hurriedly.

BAGOAS

Lady, I bring a message from my lord
Sitting in council with the captains now.
The prince commands that thou shalt feast with him
This night, and bade me lead thee to his tent.

JUDITH

O Marah, see! my lord keeps not his word.
He is as those false jewellers who change

A rich stone for a poorer — when none looks.
Five days he promised, and but three are gone,
And now he begs me come to sup with him!

MARAH

No choice hast thou, alas!

JUDITH

One needs must go —
When kings invite. The master's will is mine.
Such gloom has touched me lately, I would fain
Know mirthfulness. I jest, for in my heart
There lurks an unnamed terror. O Bagoas!
He would not slay me in some sudden freak?

(*Bagoas shrugs his shoulders*)

Does he wear arms when supping?

BAGOAS

No, he hangs
His falchion on a peg within the tent;
Dagger he hath none.

JUDITH, *softly to herself*

God be thanked for that. . . .
Upon a peg within the tent! (*Reflects*) Bagoas!

BAGOAS

What wouldst thou have, my lady?

JUDITH

Dost thou serve
The prince to-night?

BAGOAS

He has so ordered it.

JUDITH

Take it not ill if I persuade my lord
To do without thy service by and by,
Leaving thee free to go what way thou wilt.
'T would please my humor just for once to play
Cup-bearer to the prince, and fetch him drink
In that great chalice thou hast told me of.
And should I find him in a gracious mood,
As often men are between cups of wine,
I 'll breathe a word for thee into his ear.

MARAH, *aside*

My mistress plans to be alone with him!

BAGOAS, *with a quick glance at Judith*

No slave had ever such petitioner.
If thou but smile, thou 'lt have no need to speak;
Thy suit, unspoken, will be granted thee.

MARAH, *aside*

I would that we were gone from here.

JUDITH

But hold!
Perhaps my lord has other guests at hand,
And thou must still remain to wait on them.

BAGOAS

My lord's musicians and his dancing-girls —
He brings such in his train — may come awhile
For thy divertisement. No other guests.

JUDITH

That will content me better.

BAGOAS, *hesitating*

May I speak?

JUDITH

A friend's ear listens to thee; speak.

BAGOAS

This night
Thou standest in great danger. My lord's eyes
Are ravished with thy beauty — fatal gift!
His love is pitiless. (*Pauses*) Should it so turn
That he, before he hath drunk deep of wine,
Should fall into a drowse, then thou wert safe
For that time being.

JUDITH

Does wine make him sleep?

BAGOAS, *significantly*

Some wine might make him.

JUDITH, *eagerly*

What is in thy thought?

BAGOAS

I had an illness once ; sleep fled my lids
Till I went mad with wakefulness. A man
Of Koordistan, well skilled in subtle drugs,
Gave me a medicine that cured the ill,
And taught me to compound it.

JUDITH, *quickly*

Hast thou this ?

(*Bagoas nods his head affirmatively*)

Then give it me !

BAGOAS, *handing her a minute metal box, which he holds between fore-finger and thumb*

A dozen grains or so,
Dropt in a drink, will straightway dull the sense
And bring a gentle slumber presently.
'T is not a poison.

JUDITH, *placing the box in her bosom*

Would it were — that I,
At need, might take it. Though it all prove naught,
I am beholden to thee.

(*With an affectionate gesture she gives her hand to Bagoas, who kisses it respectfully*)

Tell me, now,
How fares it with the Ammonite ?

BAGOAS

He has
Such faring as a fox within a trap —
Caught but not killed.

JUDITH

What harder lies in store?

BAGOAS

I think my lord intends to take him back
To Nineveh.

JUDITH

That were not well for him?

BAGOAS

Most ill, my lady.

JUDITH

And how bears he this?

BAGOAS

As one that has looked peril in the face
By field and flood on many a desperate day,
And so disdains it. At the first my lord
Questioned him keenly, being much perplexed
That one same hour should bring ye both to camp.
The prince suspected — I know not just what.

JUDITH

And now?

BAGOAS

He doubts not that the Ammonite
And thou are strangers.

JUDITH

He has ventured life
For me, Bagoas! If the chance befell
That thou couldst loose the latchet of his trap,
Wouldst thou not do it?

BAGOAS

For thy sake I would.
But 't will not happen.

JUDITH

Heaven is over all.
Strange things ere now have happened in Judea!
(*Pauses*)
O I must speak, Bagoas! Stand apart
A moment, Marah. (*Hurriedly*) Come what will, I speak!
Dark powers, invisible ministers of air,
Led my feet hither, wherefore I knew not
At first, then presently I understood.
Two days from now 't is planned to storm the town
And put these helpless people to the sword.

BAGOAS

Such rumor fills the camp. I think it true.

JUDITH

One thing alone may stay this massacre.

BAGOAS

Whose hand may stay the Prince of Asshur's hand?

JUDITH

God's !

BAGOAS

What thou speakest is not plain to me.
Thy God 's a mystery.

JUDITH

There is that to do
Blanches the cheek and frightens sleep away.
Across my heart in characters of fire
A mortal doom is written. Before dawn
The prince must die ! — See how I trust in thee !

BAGOAS

Wouldst have me strike him as he sits at meat?
Command me, I will do it.

JUDITH

Nay, in this
'T is I alone must act, O man of men !
O lion heart ! Yet I do beg of thee
A no less heavy service. Should I fail,
Through fault of nerve or some undreamed mishap,
And in the doing find myself undone,
Swear by the love thou bearest her who waits
Thy coming in those far-off lands, O swear
That thou wilt plant thy dagger in my breast
Though thou fall dead beside me.

BAGOAS

In my mind
Such purpose stirred ere thou didst give it words.

JUDITH

Then has God sent thee! I draw breath again.
Let 's on; I must make ready for my lord.
(*Motions to Marah and Bagoas to precede her*)
(*Aside*) He said — upon a peg within the tent!

Dark stage and change of scene

SCENE II. The tent of Holofernes. A large blue pavilion set diagonally across the left rear corner of the stage. The entrance, which is very wide, hung with embroidered draperies, now drawn back. Within, a lighted cresset depends from the ceiling; near the doorway, and nearly blocking it, a low couch placed at an angle. At the right and left of the tent, outside, is a small stand upon which slaves are arranging flasks of wine, chalices, and dishes of food, fruit, etc., as the curtain rises. Among the overhanging boughs of trees glimmer lanterns of colored glass-work, and slender tripods supporting cups of burning perfume stretch in a line on either side of the stage. The scene softly illuminated.

Holofernes discovered seated on a long bench or settle, over which is spread a leopard skin. Behind this is his shield, fastened to the shaft of a javelin thrust into the ground. From the boss of the shield glares a green and gold dragon rampant. The slaves retire.

HOLOFERNES

All day have I been haunted by a dream
That in the breathless middle of the night
Robbed sleep of its refreshment. In my thought
I found myself in a damp catacomb

Searching by torchlight for my own carved name
On a sarcophagus; and as I searched,
A file of wailing shapes drew slowly near —
The hates and passions of my early youth
Become substantial and immortal things
With tongues to blazon forth each hidden crime.
Then terror fell upon me, who have known
Neither remorse nor terror, and I woke.

(*Rises dejectedly from the settle*)

The dream still frets me, still unstrings my heart.
Is it an omen sent me by the gods?
Such things foretell the doom of fateful men,
Stars, comets, apparitions hint their doom.
The night before my grandsire got his wound
In front of Memphis, and therewith was dead,
He dreamed a lying Ethiop he had slain
Was strangling him; and, later, my own sire
Saw death in a red writing on a leaf.
And I too. . . .

(*Throws himself upon the settle*)

Oh, I am ill and troubled in the mind.
That Hebrew woman shall beguile my gloom.
The hour should bring her, if she have not fled.
By what sly necromancy was I won
To give her unwatched freedom in the camp!
Should she not come! — I sigh in saying it,
As though she were a part of all my life,
This woman I have looked on but three days!

Judith enters, attended by Marah and Bagoas. As they step beyond the wings, Judith turns quickly and lays her hand on Marah's arm.

JUDITH, *in a low, hurried voice*

No further, thou. Go hide thee in the wood
Hard by, and when I call unto thee come,
And do the thing I bade thee. Fail me not!

MARAH, *lingering, pretends to arrange Judith's robe*

I shall not fail thee, thou adorable!

[*Marah goes out*

Judith, her manner indicating suppressed agitation, advances to the centre and bends low before Holofernes, who rises quickly, and taking Judith by the hand, leads her to the settle.

HOLOFERNES

The course has wearied thee, so rest thee here,
O Heart's Desire, upon this leopard skin.
From out the jungle by the Ganges' side
The creature leapt on me; and now I bear
The trophy ever with me in my wars —
A kind of talisman. Meanwhile it makes
A throne whereon a haughty queen might sit.

Judith, in dumb-show, declines the proffered seat, and begins to remove the mantle which covers her from head to foot. She throws it over the back of the settle.

JUDITH

No queen am I, but only thy handmaid.

HOLOFERNES

Ere now a handmaid has become a queen.

JUDITH

To serve thee is to reign. I keep my state,
And am most jealous of my servitude.
This night, O prince, no other slave than I
Shall wait on thee with meat and fruit and wine,
And fetch the scented water for thy hands,
And spread the silvered napkin on thy knee.
So subtle am I, I shall know thy wish
Ere thou canst speak it. Let Bagoas go
This night among his people, save he fear
To lose his place and wage, through some one else
More trained and skilful showing his defect.

HOLOFERNES, *turning to Bagoas*

Thou hearest, O Bagoas, what she says?
Another hath usurped thee. Get thee gone,
Son of the midnight! But stray not from camp,
Lest the lean tiger-whelps should break their fast,
And thou forget I must be waked at dawn.

BAGOAS

I hear, O prince.

HOLOFERNES

And send us presently
The Arab girls and him that plays the lute.

BAGOAS, *aside as he goes out*

Poor lady, in her whiteness how she looks
Like some rare idol that a conqueror
Tears from its niche, in pillaging a town,
And sets among the trappings of his tent.

(*Under his breath*)

Fear not, O prince. I shall not stray from camp!

While Holofernes divests himself of his breastplate and hangs his falchion on a peg inside the tent, Judith goes to one of the tables, and standing with her back to him, but in a position that enables her action to be observed by the audience, fills a flagon with wine, into which she hastily drops the contents of the little metal box given to her by Bagoas.

JUDITH, *aside*

O Thou who lovest Israel, give me strength
And cunning such as never woman had,
That my deceit may be his stripe and scar,
My kiss his swift destruction! If the drug
Work not its magic on him, then — what then!

Judith returns to the settle, and, kneeling, presents the cup to Holofernes. Holofernes drinks.

HOLOFERNES

Richer the wine is for those slender hands
And that gold bangle slipping down the wrist.
Now sit by me. (*She obeys*) Cup-bearer, hold the cup.
What a rare slave thou art!
A helmet heaped with pearls, i' the market-place,

Could buy thee not from me. How shall I make
Thy chains seem lighter? Our chance-builded camp
Has little entertainment in its stores;
But I have brought my troop of dancing-girls
From Nineveh, and they shall dance for us,
And one among them, that has voice, shall sing
A love-song that a Persian poet made
Before I slew him for a halting verse.

JUDITH

Surely thou didst not slay a man for that!

HOLOFERNES

Lady, it was a very grievous fault.
Who cheats in weights or measures merits death.
The Medes and Persians have it in their laws.

Enter a troop of Arab girls, with a clash of cymbals. They prostrate themselves before Judith and Holofernes, and then fall to dancing. Slaves place a small round table near the settle and bring a dish of fruit, a flask of wine, and two flagons. Holofernes and Judith eat and converse in pantomime, he insisting from time to time on her drinking from his cup, which she constantly refills. At the conclusion of the dance the Arab girls again prostrate themselves. While they are retiring, a soft music, chiefly from stringed instruments, is heard, and these verses are sung by a single voice behind the scenes. Holofernes rests an elbow on one knee, and supporting his chin on his hand, listens stolidly to the song.

O cease, sweet music, let us rest!
Too soon the hateful day is born;
Henceforth let day be counted night,
And midnight called the morn.

O cease, sweet music, let us rest!
A tearful, languid spirit lies,
Like the dim scent in violets,
In beauty's gentle eyes.

There is a sadness in sweet sound
That quickens tears. O music, lest
We weep with thy soft sorrow, cease!
Be still, and let us rest.

JUDITH, *aside*

A strange new look has crept into his face.
He listened to the music as a man
That strains his ear to catch some distant sound
Whose meaning baffles him. — What is 't, my lord?

HOLOFERNES

Thy coming chased the blackness of my day,
But now the heaviness that clouded me
Has come again.

JUDITH

The music saddened thee.

HOLOFERNES

Not so. I am not fashioned like a harp
That some chance touch may sadden or make glad.
(*Rises from the settle*)
That pungent scent of burning sandal-wood,
(*Puts his hand vaguely to his forehead*)

Or the dull opiate of those wilted flowers,
Or some malignant influence of the night
Hath drowsed me. Let me rest upon the couch
A moment; it will pass.

They enter the tent together.

JUDITH

Lie there, my prince,
I will keep watch and ward.

Holofernes reclines upon the couch, propping himself on one elbow. He points to a low tabouret at the side of the couch.

HOLOFERNES

And sit thou here,
Thou of the dove's eyes and the proud swan's throat.
Thy tresses give out odors of the rose.
Thy breath upon my cheek is as the air
Blown from a far-off grove of cinnamon.
Fairer art thou than is the night's one star —
(*Smiling*) Thou makest me a poet with thine eyes!

He puts one arm around her neck and gently draws her head to his breast. Judith rests there motionless for a moment, then slowly disengages herself and rises to her feet with a dazed, troubled look. In a second or two she recovers herself, and stooping picks up the flagon, which has fallen to the floor of the tent.

JUDITH

Sweet prince, I have forgot mine office. See,
The flagon 's empty! I 'll go fetch thee wine.

She hurries out, and sets the cup on a table, resting one hand on the edge of it, the other hand pressed against her heart.

Oh, save me, Lord, from that dark cruel prince,
And from mine own self save me! for this man,
A worshipper of senseless carven gods,
Slayer of babes upon the mother-breast,
He, even he, hath by some conjurer's trick,
Or by his heathen beauty, in me stirred
Such pity as unnerves the lifted hand.
Oh, let not my hand fail me, in Thy name!

(*She returns to the tent with wine*)

Drink this, my lord.

HOLOFERNES

In the full compass of my thirty years
At no one time have I so drunk of wine.

Holofernes, who has fallen back on the cushions, raises himself with effort on his elbow. He passes his arm around Judith's waist and constrains her to sit down on the edge of the couch. Then takes the cup and drinks.

Sweet vision, 't is a medicine that cures,
Grief will it cure and every ill, save love.
Who first did think to press it from the grape?
Art going? Nay, I know thou hast not stirred.

(*Confusedly*)

I am the plaything of vain fantasies.
Voices are calling through a mist. I hear
The clang of shields somewhere far-off, and see

The shapes of men and horses marching by —
O shadows, dreams, and visions, let me be!

Holofernes sinks back on the cushions, his arm slips from his breast, and the flagon, which he has retained in his grasp, clashes on the floor. Judith rises, startled, and looks at him with curious intentness for a few seconds.

JUDITH

My lord? . . . He sleeps! . . . Unending be his dream!

She advances a step outside the tent, grasping the folds of the looped curtain in one hand, then turns and gazes upon Holofernes.

The ignoble slumber that has fettered him
Robs not his pallid brow of majesty
Nor from the curved lip takes away the scorn

(*Lets the curtain fall across the entrance to the tent*)

Bagoas shall not awaken him at dawn!

(*Pauses*)

O broken sword of proof! O prince betrayed!
In me he trusted, he who trusted none!

(*Pauses again*)

I did not longer dare to look on him,
Lest I should lose my reason through my eyes.
This man — this man, had he been of my race,
And I a maiden, and we two had met —
What visions mock me! Some ancestral sin
Hath left a taint of madness in my brain.
Were I not I, I would unbind my hair
And let the tresses cool his fevered cheek,

And take him in my arms — Oh, am I mad?
Yonder the watch-fires flare upon the walls,
Like red hands pleading to me through the dark;
There famished women weep, and have no hope.
The moan of children moaning in the streets
Tears at my heart. O God! have I a heart?
Why do I falter! (*Kneeling*) Thou that rulest all,
Hold not Thy favor from me that I seek
This night to be Thy instrument! Dear Lord,
Look down on me, a widow of Judea,
A feeble thing unless Thou sendest strength!
A woman such as I slew Sisera.
The hand that pierced his temples with a nail
Was soft and gentle, like to mine, a hand
Moulded to press a babe against her breast!
Thou didst sustain her. Oh, sustain Thou me,
That I may free Thy chosen from their chains! —
Each sinew in my body turns to steel,
My pulses quicken, I no longer fear!
My prayer has reached Him, sitting there on high!
The hour is come I dreamed of! This for thee,
O Israel, my people, this for thee!

Soft orchestral music. Judith rushes wildly into the tent, closing the hangings behind her. The boom of a gong is heard and a sentinel near by cries: "Midnight! Midnight! All is well!" A second sentinel, further off, takes up the cry, which is repeated by a third in the remote distance. Marah and Bagoas, with anxious faces, are observed at the right-hand middle entrance. Marah crosses the stage, picks up Judith's mantle, and takes a position near Bagoas. A

sound like that of a falling body, accompanied by a muffled exclamation from Judith, is heard inside the tent. Enter Assyrian Captain, who halts abruptly, and listens.

ASSYRIAN CAPTAIN

What noise was that within?

(*To Bagoas*)

Art stricken dumb?
Some ill, perhaps, hath happened to the Prince.
Art turned to stone? Go to thy master, slave!
Myself will go.

[*Advances towards the tent*

BAGOAS, *intercepting him*

Not thou, ill-fated man!

(*Seizes the captain by the shoulder and stabs him*)

An evil star it was that led thee here!

ASSYRIAN CAPTAIN, *clutching at the air as he falls*

What dog is this has bitten me to death?
(*Faintly*) O thou vile slave, had I suspected thee . . .

[*Dies*

Judith violently thrusts the draperies aside and appears grasping an unsheathed falchion, which she flings from her.

JUDITH *to Marah*

'T is done! Do thou!

Marah goes into the tent and immediately emerges, bearing the head of Holofernes enveloped in the mantle. Judith, who has stood motionless with both hands pressed against

her eyes as if to shut out some appalling spectacle, turns and discovers Bagoas on the extreme left crouching over the body of the captain. She starts back at the sight.

BAGOAS

Quick, let the black night swallow thee! Begone!

Marah seizes Judith by the wrist. The two are seen in the act of taking flight as the curtain descends.

QUICK CURTAIN

ACT IV

(*Four days later*)

The market-place in Bethulîa. Far back on the right, the entrance to the great synagogue; the long flight of gradually ascending steps leading to the portals crowded with spectators. Garlands and cloths of gold and purple tissues hang from the windows of the houses facing on three sides of the quadrangle. In the centre of the square, a platform two or three feet in height supports a large antique chair richly draped. With the exception of the space surrounding the dais, the stage is slowly filled by people of every condition.

Enter Nathan and Joachim conversing excitedly.

NATHAN

Was it not wonderful! O day of days!
The Ammonite, held captive, saw it all.
It thrills the blood to hear him tell of it.
When they discovered Holofernes slain
And lying headless 'mid the tapestries,
A sudden silence fell upon the camp,
And all the people stood like blocks of stone
In some deserted quarry; then a voice
Blown through a trumpet clamored: *He is dead!*
The Prince is dead! The Hebrew witch hath slain
Prince Holofernes! Fly, Assyrians, fly!
On this a panic seized the Asshur hosts;

They broke and fled from that strong mountain-
hold,
Leaving their arms, their chariots, and their tents,
Even the camels tethered at the stake!
Our children's children shall be told this tale.

JOACHIM

Three days and nights at point of our red spears
The cohorts scattered. Such as know not death
Are safe now in Damascus, or beyond.

NATHAN

'T was Achior led the horsemen. It is said
A man he made a friend of in the camp
Set Achior free.

JOACHIM

That in effect is true —
A captive Holofernes held in thrall
As slave. That gaunt and swarthy-visaged man
Who follows Achior everywhere is he.

NATHAN, *meditatively*

To think a woman did it! Day of days!
Yet is not Judith made of tenderness?
I saw her stoop once in the crowded street
To kiss a sickly child the mother held.

JOACHIM

A warrior's soul, a woman's heart! I hear
That she has begged the Patriarchs to remove

The head of Holofernes from the lance
On which 't is set above the Eastern Gate.

NATHAN, *still meditative*

Such pity meetly crowns the daring act.
I wonder, now, the peril being past
And all her pulses stilled, if in her thought
There is not some vague, nameless sense of dread
Of her own self that could do such a deed!

JOACHIM

O Nathan, son of Paul, thou ever wert
A splitter of fine hairs! Had she not slain
That monster in his hour of victory,
Making his pride to bite the very dust,
What had become of *thee*, and all of us!

NATHAN

True! — through God's grace and that one woman's hand
The tombs and temples of Judea were saved.
I would not look good fortune in the teeth,
But somehow the event breeds thoughts in me.

JOACHIM

It were more wholesome to have fewer, man!
I trust thou hast not spoken much of this.

NATHAN

Do I look like a fool?

JOACHIM

No, no, good friend —
That 's what astonishes! But say no more.
This hour comes Judith to the market-place,
Where a glad people fain would honor her
With pipe and timbrel and the heart's acclaim.
See what a mighty throng has gathered here!

[*Nathan and Joachim stand aside*

Enter Bagoas and Achior.

BAGOAS

O Captain, be not prodigal of thanks.
'T was that brave lady bade me break thy chain.

ACHIOR

Alas, Bagoas, that did not set me free!
I am a prisoner whose manacles
Are newly riveted. 'T is mine to have
A most sweet cruel jailer who forbids
My presence. Only by a chance like this
May I behold her.

[*A flourish of trumpets, then distant music*

BAGOAS

There my lady comes! —
My fate and thine are one, brave Ammonite.
Though I go back to Koordistán enriched
With all the gold and trappings that were found
In Holofernes' tent — her gift to me —
I still go back a captive, ever bound

In bands of love and reverence for her.
Daring and meek and merciful is she,
And pure as is the white eternal snow
That lies unreached upon the mountain top.

ACHIOR

Thou didst watch over her that dreadful night.
I envy thee the office that was thine,
To stand there in the dark, with dagger drawn,
To save her or avenge, had all gone ill.

BAGOAS

And thou — for her sake didst thou not dare death ?

The music approaches. The multitude sways to and fro, and voices cry: "She is coming!" "She who saved us is coming!" Achior and Bagoas join Nathan and Joachim at the wings near the footlights. The crowd parts right and left to give way to Ozias, Chabris, and Charmis, accompanied by chief captains, civic dignitaries, and men-at-arms bearing banners. Enter a troop of maidens dancing, followed by Judith dressed in her widow's weeds as in Act I. She is very pale, and walks with bowed head, Marah a few steps in the rear. The music dies down to a low murmur.

NATHAN

I thought she would come clad in cloth of gold,
Not in the sombre livery of grief.

JOACHIM

Like some victorious chief returned from war,
She lays aside her armor.

The Patriarchs conduct Judith to the foot of the dais, and motion her to ascend. She seems to demur. The Patriarchs, apparently embarrassed, expostulate in dumb-show, pointing appealingly to the empty chair.

NATHAN

See! she halts
Before the throne; they urge her to ascend,
And she, as one unworthy, still protests.
She takes her triumph modestly, methinks.

JOACHIM

Nigh unto Dothaim is a sepulchre
Where all her pride lies buried.

ACHIOR, *sadly*

And her love!

One of the chief captains reaches forward and places a light chaplet of laurel upon Judith's brow. Tumultuous cries and cheers.

JUDITH, *in a low voice*

Oh, who am I to sit upon a throne?
It were more fitting I should bow me down
At the throne's foot, my forehead in the dust.
Ozias, I have drunk a bitter cup!
Deck me with rue and fennel, if thou wilt.

OZIAS *to Judith*

Nay, gentle Judith, they will take it ill
That came from far and near to honor thee.

Thy name is in their hearts and in their prayers,
And they would look upon thy face this day.

JUDITH

So be it, then — it was for love of them!
My city, Bethulia, 't was for thee!

NATHAN

See! she consents.

ACHIOR, *rapturously*

Her face is like a star!

Judith slowly mounts the dais and stands erect, with one hand resting on the arm of the chair. There is a beatific expression on her features as she faces the populace. Those immediately about the platform kneel.

Mark how the warm blood steals into her cheek!
Such tint it brings as in the season's prime
Creeps up the slender stem to dye the rose.

NATHAN, *smiling*

A singer of love canticles was spoiled
When Achior turned soldier.

JOACHIM

Peace, man, peace!
I wonder will she speak. She lifts her hand
As if to beg the silence of the crowd.

JUDITH

Oh, not to me, but unto the Most High
Lift up thy voices! Glorify His name

With pipe and harp and solemn chanted psalm!
Let the triumphant breath of trumpets blow
The news to the four winds, Judea is saved!
For once again hath God delivered us.
He was the hand, and I was but the sword,
The sword was I, and He the hand that smote.
Glory and praise to Him forevermore!

(*Pauses*)

The spell is broken. Now farewell to all,
To votive wreath and music's blandishment.

(*Takes off the chaplet and holds it in her hand*)

From this day forth I dwell apart, alone
In mine own house, where laughter may not come
Nor any light, vain voices of the world.
Only the sorrowful shall find the door
Unbarred and open.

(*Descends the first step of the dais, and lingers*)

In thy memory
Keep me as some beloved wife or child
Or sister that died long and long ago!

Cries of "Judith!" "Judith!" "Judith!" Children scatter flowers and palm-sprays at her feet. A sudden blare of trumpets, followed by soft orchestral music. Judith deseends from the dais. The crowd falls back in silence. Achior impulsively advances a pace or two towards her, and then halts, irresolute.

ACHIOR, *with an imploring gesture*

Judith!

JUDITH, *hurriedly wrapping herself in the black veil, one end of which she throws over the lower part of her face*

Let no one born of woman follow me!

[*Swift exit*

Bagoas grasps Achior by the arm, restraining him. The crowd leans forward with outstretched hands, and stands spell-bound gazing after Judith. Tableau.

SLOW CURTAIN

LONGFELLOW

1807–1907

Above his grave the grass and snow
Their soft antiphonal strophes write:
Moonrise and daybreak come and go:
Summer by summer on the height
The thrushes find melodious breath.
Here let no vagrant winds that blow
Across the spaces of the night
Whisper of death.

They do not die who leave their thought
Imprinted on some deathless page.
Themselves may pass; the spell they wrought
Endures on earth from age to age.
And thou, whose voice but yesterday
Fell upon charmèd listening ears,
Thou shalt not know the touch of years;
Thou holdest time and chance at bay.
Thou livest in thy living word
As when its cadence first was heard.
O gracious Poet and benign,
Belovèd presence! now as then
Thou standest by the hearths of men.

Their fireside joys and griefs are thine;
Thou speakest to them of their dead,
They listen and are comforted.
They break the bread and pour the wine
Of life with thee, as in those days
Men saw thee passing on the street
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That walk in far celestial ways!

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